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A ROMANTIC STORY FOUNDED UPON THE GREAT PLAY OF THE SAME NAME.

By GRACE MILLER WHITE.

"HEAVENS SHE IS WALKING IN HER SLEEP."

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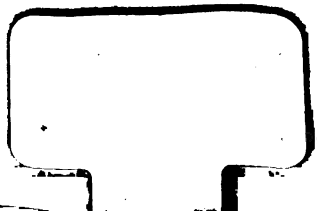
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When the World Sleeps

A ROMANTIC STORY.

Founded Upon the Play of the Same Name.

BY

GRACE MILLER WHITE,

Author of "Driven From Home," "Joe Welch the Peddler," "No Wedding Bells for Her," "Sky Farm," "A Midnight Marriage," "Souvenir Book of 'Way Down East'," "Why Women Sin," "Human Hearts," "A Ragged Hero," "From Rags to Riches," "Deserted at the Altar," "The Holy City," Etc., Etc.

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WHEN THE WORLD SLEEPS

CHAPTER I.

"'TAIN'T no use, Ellen, to talk such things to me. Thet boy hes broke the law and he's got to pay fer it. Have you ever heard of me a-neglecting my duty?"

The speaker rose, knocked the ashes from his pipe and sat down again as he fumbled in his pocket for a bag of tobacco. He smoothed his long, flowing beard with a frown, and looked keenly at his wife.

"I know, pa," faltered the woman; "I know you be always ready to do your duty, but don't you think you've worked hard enough now to take a little rest from such as this. There ain't many fathers as would run down their own sons and

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put them in prison when they could just let the matter rest."

Again the huge form of the sheriff, who was Luke Hardy, rose from the chair. A frown had settled on his brow, and his face expressed his emotion.

"Ma, hain't I allers told you never to interfere with my business, and hain't you allers said you wouldn't?"

"I hev, pa, but this is my business, too. Dick is all the baby the Lord ever sent me, and I love him——"

"Better than you do me," put in the sheriff.

"No, not better, only different, pa; he is my own blood, my own heart, and, pa, if you takes him to jail I shall die."

There was silence for a long time, the only sign perceptible to the ear being the puffing of the sheriff's pipe.

He loved this mother of his boy, and Heaven knew that the boy, too, was deeply held in his heart, but duty called him and he had never in all his life faltered. His son had committed a

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crime, and duty called him to hunt for the baby he had always been so proud of, now grown into a man. And the sheriff knew what it meant when he discovered Dick. Dick, with the curls, the laughing face, the sweet boy who had been the pride of the village. Of course, the prison stared him in the face, and what was more the mother would die of a broken heart, and his lips twitched as the thought of these things ran through his mind. For years, ever since he had been a boy, he had loved this woman. He had carried her dinner pail through the snow and through the rain, to the small country schoolhouse on the hill, and had later led her to the altar. Then had come the birth of the boy, little Dick, and for years he had done his duty without a swerve from the right, but now a new one faced him—one so terrible, so near his heart that the big fellow stood aghast. How he dreaded to even see the sight of his son's face. How he longed to do something to prove his innocence if it were possible, but he knew how strict were the laws of the State, and Dick had become a forger since his leaving

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home. Neither father or mother knew why, but the fact remained, and the law called upon the sheriff to take his son and place him within the walls of the prison.

"Well, he's my blood, too, ma," he said at last, "as much as he is yours, and yet 'tain't my bisiness to let him go from under my nose, even if he is my own son. Ma, do you know where that boy is?"

The woman shook her head and looked into the wood fire burning in the grate.

"Would you tell me ef you knew, ma?" asked the sheriff.

Again the woman shook her head negatively.

"Course you wouldn't, little mother," replied Hardy, "and 'tain't human ter ask such a thing of yer. A man ought to know better, but, ma, I ain't never done nothing in my life what was dishonest."

"I know that, pa," softly replied the woman; "I know that well, and you ain't going to do nothin' you ought not to now, but, pa, couldn't you

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jest pretend that you was blind on one side when Dick was a-gettin' out of your way?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"No, ma, but I kin say this: ef you see the boy, then I want you to tell him to get away from the sheriff of this county as fast as his legs will take him, and ef he wants money you go to the bank and get it, but also tell him that if I clap my eyes on him he goes behind the bars."

The quietude was only broken by the crackling of the fire, for neither man nor woman felt like talking when a great grief had settled down upon their homes.

The son had been the apple of his father's eye. He had brought up the boy in the fear of God, and had taught him never to walk in forbidden paths, cautioned him of the pitfalls of the wicked world, which was teeming over beyond the hill, where Dick had gone to make his way in the world.

But all this work of a lifetime had done no good, for had not one of the wealthy town citizens but the week before told him that the bank had

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notified him that a check had been drawn and forged by Dick Hardy for the sum of $2,000? The father wondered afterward how he had stood so calmly and listened to the words which had made him seem like an old man; how he had raised his head and in a deep tone replied that he would use the strength of his office to bring the young criminal to justice.

He had walked home in a maze and had not dared to tell the mother of her son's fall until they had gone to bed, and then slowly and gently he led her after him until she realized that her hope had died in his words.

How many times she had dreamed of her Dick; he would settle down and marry some nice girl, bring her home and then—— This great-hearted woman had often felt the twining of baby fingers about her heart-strings and 'twas Dick's baby who often in her imagination soothed her to sleep, but she had never mentioned this to her husband, as he was so stern, so dreadful in his sense of justice, and never until now had she really known his true heart. She felt that there would be some

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way for her to help her darling—some little light would glimmer through the cloud that seemed deeper than she could bear.

Through the long evening the father and mother sat talking of their grief, for, although they had known of it for many hours, it was not until now that they had fully opened their hearts to one another. The sheriff contended that he would take the boy if he came in his way, yet all the time praying that such a calamity would not happen.

There was an awful silence after the light had been turned out. The mother could hear the crooning of the frogs in the pond below the old mill. She strained her ears to listen, for they seemed to bring to her mind the little curly-headed fellow who had been her one joy. She could hear the loud breathing of her husband at her side. It told her that, in spite of his grief, he had fallen to sleep; that tired nature was seeking its rest.

Mrs. Hardy wondered if she would ever sleep again—wondered if death would relieve her of

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the constant pain at her heart. She never knew just how long she lay, for the moments dragged in the night, when the darkness filled her with terror.

Suddenly she heard a slight tapping on the window. She raised on her arm to listen. Was it the old Toby cat, who wanted to come in? Was it some one coming with word for the sheriff that a crime had been committed? Never before had that word been fully realized by this woman until now.

She listened again, and heard the same sound. Slowly she raised upon her elbow and started to crawl over her husband. Once he stirred in his sleep and the woman waited. Something told her that the sound upon the window meant that she should come. Once long ago, when Dick had been out to a party in the country and had come home late, he had found the door locked. The same scratching sound had wakened the mother, and she had opened the window and half dragged the laughing boy into the room. Oh, that this

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might be her Dick—but no, his father would drag him from her. By this time she was on the floor, her face pale with emotion. She halted and listened. She heard the sound again, and this time went swiftly from the room. Every step of the old home she knew by heart, and she dared not strike a match for fear she would arouse her husband.

She stepped to the window, and against the pane was pressed a white face, with two glowing blue eyes staring into the room.

She started back with an ejaculation, as she had not expected to see such an apparition. She knew now that it was Dick.

Slowly and without a particle of noise she slid the window up and drew a pale-faced boy, hardly a man, into the room. The embers had not yet died in the grate, so Mrs. Hardy knew that the hours had not been many since she had gone to bed. Her husband was in his first hard sleep, and nothing but a good sound shake would waken him.

"Dick," she murmured, "don't make a noise;

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you will wake your father, and the bills hes been pasted fer yer around town."

"I know, mother," replied Dick, kissing her face tenderly, and looking about the room apprehensively; "I had to come home for a short time. I wanted you to know how I came to do that awful thing."

"Then tell me, boy," and the sheriff's wife led him into the kitchen, where she added a log to the embers in the stove, and drew a chair for him to be seated. There was yet no light, but intuitively the mother felt that her darling was pale and hurt. She gathered him close with one great sob. He wept upon her shoulder for fully five minutes and then, with a start, commenced to speak.

"I never would have done it, mother, if it hadn't been for her."

"For whom, son?"

"For Mary Farrell. You remember her?"

The woman nodded in the dark.

"I left her, only to make a way in the world,

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and, mother, when I came back for her her life had been ruined and she was dying."

The mother shuddered in the shadowy light. This was the end of the longing for the baby fingers which for years she had dreamed of.

"I wish we could have a light," she replied, looking toward the room where her husband slept. "It's so dark, Dick, and I want to see your face."

The young man took a match from his pocket and buried it in the fire. It had soon illuminated the room, and he touched the wick to the lamp which his mother had taken in her hands.

Long Mrs. Hardy looked into Dick's face. Pale and thin, emaciated by suffering, the mother would never have known that this man, now so haggard, was the same one she had allowed to leave her but so short a time before.

"Now, tell me, son, that my heart may not break. I never knew that you loved Mary Farrell."

"Always since the time we were children. Father told me once how he used to carry your

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dinner pail to school. Well, mother, so I carried Mary's, and I loved her so."

A sob filled the throat that had uttered these words. The mother broke the silence that seemed to be painful.

"And what happened to her?"

"She is dead."

"And what killed her? Oh, Dick, tell your mother."

"I found her dying," replied Dick, "and I had no money, and I did that awful thing, thinking that soon I could pay back the debt. I hoped Brandon would never tell my father, they were such good friends."

"Why didn't you send to me for the money," cried the mother; "I would have brought your wounded love home here, and together we might have nursed her back to life."

The boy shuddered.

"That could never be," said he, pain filling his eyes with tears. "She had passed out of my life forever, but I loved her, nevertheless."

Suddenly the mother seemed to realize.

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"Some other man took your love away from you?"

"Yes, and left her dying and starving to death, and if I live a thousand years I shall never forget the look she gave me that awful day when I found her. I had to get her food and comforts."

Somehow the mother realized, and nodded her head sympathetically.

"And then when she died I wanted to pay back the money, but I heard that father had a warrant for my arrest. Mother, I can never go to prison and leave that man living who ruined my darling's life."

Mrs. Hardy started suddenly. Was he going to add murder to his already bad crime?

"Who was the man?" she asked, wanting something to say.

"Earnest Carlisle."

"You mean Robert's brother?"

Dick nodded his head.

"And he was your friend all your life?"

"Yes, and knew that I loved her better than my

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very existence. I would have lain down my own life rather than to have had her suffer as she did."

Mrs. Hardy patted the boy's arm. His eyes had blazed with anger and deadly hate. She shuddered as she tried to soothe him. Now she wished she knew more of the Bible, that she might quote a few verses to him. The only thought that came into her mind was to do unto others as ye would be done by.

She muttered the words, and Dick caught them.

"Aye," he replied, bitterly, "and if I had done that dastardly deed then would I want some good man to put an end to my unworthy life, that I might rid myself of the pangs of my conscience."

"But, Dick, you are not going to——"

"Just as soon as I find him, mother! No, no, don't try to turn me from my purpose. I intend to make him answer for her death, and I promised myself that over her dead body."

"But, Dick, if you should see him, you might want to kill him."

"Nothing less than his life, mother——"

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The startled cry which broke from the woman's lips brought them both to their feet. A voice from the other room called "Mother," and Dick Hardy silently opened the window and stepped into the night.

"I will see you again, mother," he whispered as he heard his father call once more from the other room.

The sheriff's wife went back to her bed in a dreadful maze. She suffered now more than before. Her boy stood within the shadow of the gallows, and was there nothing that could save him from it?

She went to bed again with a sob in her heart, and the morning found her ill and nervous, but nothing seemed able to keep her in bed.

What would she do? She knew that Earnest Carlisle's home was not far from theirs. Would her son loiter about until he came out and then kill him. During the morning she put on her wraps and went down the country road to the office. Her husband had gone out early. There might be some news in the village, and she felt

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that to wait until the sheriff's return would be too much of a tax on her nerves.

But the town seemed to be quiet. There was the same number of men hanging about the country store waiting for the mail, and the usual gathering of children to watch the incoming of the stage, but the sheriff's wife had no heart for aught but news of her boy, and she wondered where he might be. Her husband's calling her the night before had sent from her mind the desire to find out where Dick was stopping.

She passed several of the posters put up by her own boy's father, requesting any citizen who should see one Richard Hardy, commonly known as Dick, to send for the sheriff of the county. A liberal reward was offered, and the mother shuddered and tears filled the faded eyes, for never had she realized what suffering was. She could remember standing over the grave of her father and mother; she had buried most of her kin, but that grief was nothing compared to this. The old adage that a dead grief could not compare to a living one came into her mind.

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Some one stopped her, and asked after the health of her husband, but not one dared mention the son, the wayward child who had caused his father and mother to hang their heads in shame.

After leaving the village she walked on and on, for home seemed so desolate, and she did not wish to remain there alone, and then, too, something might happen. She trembled with a terrifying fear, for had not her husband told her many times that a reward always brought good results?

The money offered by the county would in all probability bring her boy to a felon's cell, and suddenly she thought of his pressing needs and she knew that he had returned almost all of the money he had gotten on the check, even before the father had been notified of his son's crime, but now he would need money, and with this thought in her mind she turned sharply about and went into the bank, and when she came out a comfortable little sum lay snugly in her bosom.

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CHAPTER II.

JANE WEATHERBY was one of the rich members of the town's high society, in which she had most to say, for she gave every year twice as much as any ten members to all the charities and churches. She lived not far from the county jail, and her home settled in among tall trees and a high hedge surrounded it.

For many years she had been living with her two nephews, children of her dead brother.

She prided herself upon bringing these boys up in the best style, and she knew that Earnest was not quite as upright as Robert, but the good-hearted woman never for one moment imagined that he would do anything wrong.

There was one grief just now upon her heart. She feared that her brother, an old, good-hearted

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man had met his death in some peculiar way. He had been missing for several weeks and no one seemed able to find out anything about him. Mrs. Weatherby trembled when she realized that he might be held for a reward; so added to that of the sheriff's son, was another poster offering big money for news of the old man.

But the days dragged on and the sister heard nothing of her brother. The nephews also had taken an active interest in the finding of their uncle. The district attorney, a great friend of the Carlilse's, was seemingly constantly upon the alert to find both the missing man and the sheriff's son.

This day the Weatherby home was all astir for many were visiting there. Robert Carlisle had fallen deeply in love with a young orphan named Virginia Grey, and his affection was returned, and to-day the girl was visiting at her lover's home, and she had been helping the mistress of the home put a quilt upon the frames. All the afternoon they had worked away and the topic of

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conversation had been the missing uncle and the sheriff's son.

"It would break my heart," said Mrs. Weatherby, "if anything should happen to one of my boys; but then, I know that neither Earnest nor Rob would do such a wicked thing as poor Hardy's boy has done."

Virginia shook her head. She was not so sure of Earnest, for there was something repulsive in his manner toward her; she had suffered from a declaration of love from both him and the district attorney, whose name was Benedict Strong. She had, with maidenly reserve, denied them both the right to place a kiss upon her lips, and the girl felt always in their presence that she was watched keenly; but Robert was her source of joy, and she felt perfectly safe when he was about.

The quilt had been taken off the frame, and Mrs. Weatherby called Margaret, the maid, to help in removing the threads from the carpet.

She sent Virginia into the parlor, which was hardly ever opened, to bring a large glass of jelly

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from the closet, that they might have a little lunch after such a hard day's work.

Margaret, a character in herself, swept as she talked.

"I never saw such folks to borrow as them Tuckers is, mam," she said, digging into the carpet with a vengeance. "Triphenie just came in and wanted to borry near all we had."

"Did you loan her anything, Margaret?" asked the mistress.

"No, I told her she'd had all she was a goin' to get from this house, and that's all there was to it."

Margaret spoke with the conviction of a favored servant.

"Don't be hard on the child, Maggie," said Mrs. Weatherby, "for she hain't never had no mother, and her heart is sore every time her father gets married again, and you know he has buried his third."

"Yes, and is looking fer a fourth, mam," cried the girl grimly, "fer he asked that child if I would be her mother. Now, what do you think of that?"

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"What did you say to her, Maggie?" curiously asked Mrs. Weatherby.

"I didn't say fer sure, mam," replied the servant, stammering, "fer you know thet there are a whole lot worse looking men than Zabi Tucker, and I ain't no kid no longer."

"Then you think seriously of marrying and leaving me, Maggie?"

"Well, I hain't said I would and I hain't said I wouldn't, so there ain't no use a worrying."

At this juncture a weird sound came from the hall. One might have thought it was a little animal calling for food, or a child half daft.

"There's Croonie," said Mrs. Weatherby. "The floor is clean now Maggie, the child wants you."

"I don't want her, mam," said a small voice, and the tousled head of a small child shoved in the door, "I wants you. The sheriff passed by and said that he might be over to see you this evening. He say thet you be a good woman and he be a going to find your brother for you. Oh, all day, I've felt the lizards a walking about in my head, and the frogs a singing in my heart. I

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wants a father, that's what I want. Aunt Margaret, who is my father?"

The child was about eight years old, and it could be plainly seen that he was only half-witted, and his vacant eyes and sunken mouth told of years of unnatural living.

Mrs. Weatherby, with her kindly heart, had consented that her servant, Margaret, should bring her little nephew home to live with them, and he had spent the most of his life on the farm.

"Well, you ain't got no father as likes yer, so shut up." Maggie said this to hide the emotion in her heart.

"All boys got fathers somewhere," persisted the child. "I knows they have, fer some of the fellers down at the office said so, and they said——"

"Will you shut up?" cried the aunt.

"No, I won't, so there," replied the poor child. "I don't like the man what they say is my father. Is that old Strong my dad?" Then as if another little thought came into the befuddled brain he turned the conversation quickly. "Aunt Mag, I

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got a star sitting in my brain, and don't you fergit it. I ain't never goin' to have a heart without a star."

"Hush, child,' put in Mrs. Weatherby, "and run downstairs."

The child turned and left the room, and Margaret, her eyes full of tears, followed after, for this tender-hearted aunt could never hear the child mutter in his childishness that she did not shed tears.

Virginia opened the parlor door softly to get the jelly from the closet shelf. She intended to rush in and right out again, for she disliked the "best room" with all her heart. If the Weatherby's had a party there she preferred to sit with Robert in the common room than in the stilted high-backed chairs and the smell of mustiness in the room.

As she opened the door she heard the sound of voices and directly ahead of her she saw in the mirror the faces of Benedict Strong and Earnest Carlisle. Heartily hating these men she turned to go back when startling words made her falter.

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"No one ever comes in here," Earnest was saying, "so fire ahead and tell me what you have done."

"He's dead, all right."

"Well."

"You won't be troubled any more with him," went on Strong, "and I have the policies."

"Good! Did you get the policies?"

"Yes, you bet we did, for they were what we were after. Here they are."

The waiting girl behind the curtain faltered as she listened. The conversation savored of something interesting, and nothing could have drawn her from the spot.

"Did any one see you?" and Virginia heard Earnest Carlisle clear his throat.

"Not a soul. I had Gid throw him over the wheel, and I turned on the water. He can't be near the place now, and his body has probably floated out to sea."

"I haven't dared to speak to you about this before," went on Earnest, "for fear other ears

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would hear, but the wonder of his disappearance is fast dying out, and I think——"

"Yes, Earnest, but I want you to open these policies and let me see. I am to have half of the money, and you must draw it now that the sensation is dying out."

"Then let me have the papers."

Virginia saw the package taken from Strong's hand and transferred to Earnest's.

She could not have moved now had she been obliged to, but yet she did not realize until the next speech that she was listening to one of the greatest crimes committed in that town in many years.

"Your uncle fought like a demon when he found he had been trapped. Poor old man, I felt rather sorry to hear him beg so for his life. He offered Gid his farm if he would spare him, and if it hadn't been for me, Gid would have turned tail at the last moment."

"And you——"

"Why, I rushed in and spurred Gid on and in a few moments it was all over. I promised Gid

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$500 and told him the old man would pinch him the moment he got away and the farm would never be his, and he saw the wisdom of that."

"Well, I should think so. Did you find out where he keeps his strong-box?"

"Yes, and I have the keys."

Still the girl behind the curtain hardly breathed. She wished now that she had not ventured to wait after she heard the voices. Now she was there she dared not move. These wicked men who had lured an old man to his death, had stolen his property. Here she listened again. Earnest was counting over the insurance policies.

"Ten, twenty, thirty. There are thirty thousand besides the will. The old man never cared much about me, so I suppose that Rob will come in for the greatest share of that."

He was opening the policies, and as he read a shadow fell over his face.

"What's the matter?"

"He has left them to Robert. They are all in his name. Curse the luck. Strong, I never meant to lure you to this, I thought——"

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"Yes, you thought," put in Strong, "and you have made me commit a dastardly deed——"

Here the curtains rustled and both men stepped forward with bated breath. The door was closed and the curtains were drawn together. But there was no one in sight.

"I could have sworn I saw those curtains rustle," gasped Earnest, "but evidently not. Here, old fellow, we'll get out of this some way. I must impersonate my brother Robert and get the money, and we will be well heeled for our business."

"Yes," sneered Strong; "you think I'm going to stand for that? Well, don't get it into your head. I'll fix you now here in this room so you won't tell any tales on me, you dastardly coward. I know what I'll do."

The district attorney had his fingers upon Earnest's throat, and the startled eyes of his victim seemed to be jumping from his head. He turned at a noise at the door, and a pale, emaciated face peeped in behind the curtain. The dusk covered up the scene in the room, and Strong threw the

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man he was choking from him and backed into the shadows. Dick Hardy stepped into the light so that Earnest Carlisle saw him. He pulled himself together, as he recognized the intruder and gasped:

"Dick, what in Heaven's name——"

"I have come to settle with you. Mary Farrell told me on her death-bed that you were to blame for her death, and I am here." He made a step forward and Earnest Carlisle grappled with him. Then another shadow flitted into the room. The little crazy boy Croonie stood aghast as he saw Strong glide out of the darkness, take a knife from his pocket and send it far into the heart of Earnest Carlisle. The man dropped dead in Dick Hardy's arms. It was all over. Dick saw that he would be trapped in a murder case, although he could not discover how it was that Earnest had been killed, knowing that he himself had not used the knife in his hand. He opened his fingers and threw it away in terror, regretting it the moment after. But he knew that this would never be believed, so when he saw little Croonie

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in the shadowy light he whispered: "Croonie, this is Dick. Get the knife, I am going away. Bring it to me at the old mill in one week at the farthest." The last words were spoken as the young man slid from the window. Strong was, by this time, in the sitting-room as if nothing had happened. He had put an end to the life of Earnest, for he knew that there would be no safety for him with this man alive. He had forgotten all the past days, when they were boys together, when they had concocted plans of how they would sometime run away from home and join the Indians.

He had not seen the half-witted child nor did he know that a girl, sweet, strong and loyal, had the secret of his crime locked in her breast.

Later another deadly sequel to the hideous crime came to light. Virginia could not keep away from the parlor, where she had heard the terrible crime disclosed. She went again into the dark room, fate leading her footsteps toward the ghastly dead thing near the window. She saw the body lying there, and knew that she was in

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the presence of the dead. With a shudder she turned away and Robert Carlisle entered by the hall door and saw the glimmer of her red dress flitting from the room. He had seen her enter, and thinking it strange, as very few ever went into the "best room," save on Sundays, he followed, but hoping to surprise her and take her in his arms he went in by the other door. He came face to face with the body of his brother, and a terrible conviction swept over his mind.

"My God, she has killed him," he muttered as he turned the body over and looked into the drawn face. "My love, my love, why did you not wait for me to settle your account with him? But I must save her." Robert knew that there would soon be a cry of murder over the house. He felt sure that if Virginia were brought face to face with accusers she would break down and confess that she had done the murder. He would forestall any such chance as this. He knew that the sheriff was talking with his aunt in the upper room. He would go up and give himself into the

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hands of the law, keeping Virginia out of the matter altogether.

He went slowly upstairs, his eyes strained with horror. The town seemed to be fated as far as tragedies were concerned. The sheriff sat pale and stern before him as he entered. He was just speaking:

"My own heart would dictate that I should not follow my poor boy, but God knows I have never, in all my life, shirked a duty. It may not seem hard to you, but I would rather die in my tracks than to take my boy a prisoner."

"No doubt you would," replied Mrs. Weatherby, "and while I feel that I must ask you questions about the mysterious disappearance of my brother, I also know that your own heart is almost broken."

"His mother's too," replied the sheriff, wiping a tear from his eyes. "This will be the death of her I fear, for she is a woman of great feeling and the loss of her boy, and his fall from the right path hit her hard."

"I believe that," replied the mistress of the

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farm; "Ellen was proud of that child from the day of his birth. I wonder that such a boy as he could ever do such a thing. He always seemed such a nice fellow. Now my impulsive Earnest, if it had been him——"

Here the door opened, and Robert Carlisle, having heard all, stood before them.

"Sheriff," he began, his throat filling with sobs, and casting an appealing glance at his aunt, "I am here to give myself into your hands. I am the murderer of my brother Earnest."

There was no sound in the room for fully a moment. The sheriff then cleared his throat.

Mrs. Weatherby had not realized what the boy had said, and when the full conviction of it all came over her, she dropped in a swoon on the floor.

Virginia heard the confession of her lover with quivering lids. She had seen the dead body, but there was no one in sight and she had left from sheer fear.

The district attorney patted himself on the back when he heard that Robert Carlisle had

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taken the blame of the murder. He did not know why, but he realized that the young man must have some reason for it.

So when the sheriff announced that he would have to take the young man to jail for the murder of his brother, Strong stepped forward and said:

"Sheriff, you have taken a painful duty from me; I saw the murder committed and was just about to arrest your prisoner."

The speaker raised his eyes to those of Robert Carlisle as he said this, and a glitter steely and fierce passed between them.

As Robert left the house with the sheriff he found a few moments in which he could say to Strong, without being overheard by another:

"You're a liar, and don't forget that. There will come a time when I shall be able to prove that you are the greatest fiend in the world. Until then good-by."

A loud laugh rang out from the district attorney, and Robert Carlisle looked for the last time for many a day upon the home of his childhood.

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CHAPTER III.

WHEN the sheriff came into his supper and told his wife of the terrible confession of Robert she stood with her hands broadly upon her hips. She looked hard into her husband's face to see if he meant what he said.

"You can't make me believe that Robert Carlisle did that," said she at last.

"He admitted it," replied the sheriff, his face covered with water and using the towel as he sputtered.

"Never mind if he did, I know that he ain't never done nothing like that. There is something behind this affair."

"What can there be behind it?" put in the sheriff. "I guess no man ain't going to put his neck in the noose for nothing. Why, he comes as

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straight as a die to me and says, 'I did that murder, and here I be.' Now, ma, what do you say to that?"

"Just what I said before, and that be that there is something behind it all, for Robert is as gentle as a baby, and would kill no one."

"Well, all I can say is that any man's a fool who will take the blame of a murder from another one's shoulder. But for fear you're right, mother, and for the love I bear that poor boy, I'm going to find the man who did do it."

"'Tain't no easy job, let me tell you," replied the good woman, "and I won't weep no more over my Dick, for he hain't in near such bad straights as Robert. I believe Dick will come out some day and won't have to——"

"Don't set you heart on the lad's comin' home, mother,' cried the sheriff. "If he should land here some day, my duty would be to arrest him in the name of the law."

"Have you taken Robert to the murderer's cell?" asked Mrs. Hardy after a time of silence. "It seems that you might——"

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"Of course I took him to the murderer's cell," was the curt reply. "Mother, I never let my feelin's get away with me. That cell is the place for him, and he's goin' to stay there till it's proved that he ain't guilty."

"Be you going to let Virginia Grey go see him whenever she wishes?" spoke up the sheriff's wife.

"As long and as often as the law allows. Now, mother, you'd better go in to see the boy, fer he was more'n good to Dick when he was a kid."

Here the sheriff turned away with a sigh. All the fatherly air castles he had built over his boy's cradle had gone into nothing, and the old man was now facing his last days without the comfort of his son.

After clearing away the supper dishes and arranging the furniture the sheriff's wife took herself to the back of the building, which had been prepared for the criminals.

She knocked lightly and the deputy sheriff opened the door and replied to her question that Robert was in the lower cell, and that the young

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man had suffered keenly since his arrival in the prison.

"Very well, Peters," responded Mrs. Hardy, "I will find him."

There was a mixture of emotion in her heart as the woman made her way through the dark corridors to Robert. How many times she had given this boy, in company with her own son, a ginger cookie and sent them both out to play. Tears filled her eyes and for a moment she halted and wiped them away with her apron. Then, with an effort to collect herself, she stopped before the grated door.

Robert Carlisle was lying face downward on the bunk.

"Robert," whispered Mrs. Hardy, "can't you raise your face and look me in the eyes?"

Slowly the tired head was lifted, and Mrs. Hardy could see a trace of tears.

"I was your friend when you were a baby boy," she cried, sobbing. "I loved you when you was only a little thing, and do you suppose that I'm going back on yer now?"

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Robert put his hand through the grating and clutched the red fingers of the sheriff's wife.

"Ah, good Mrs. Hardy," cried he, "you were like a mother to me when I was a child, and now when I need friends so badly you are here. I thank you for coming, but I fear the case is so hopeless against me that I see no light shining through."

A break in his voice demonstrated his grief.

"And your poor aunt," went on Mrs. Hardy. "I know she is heart-broken. Robert, will you tell me the gospel truth? Did you kill your brother Earnest?"

The young man found it hard to look into the kindly flushed face through the bars, and tell a direct falsehood.

"I have confessed to it; isn't that enough?"

"But I don't believe that you ever did it," persisted Mrs. Hardy. "There ain't no use as I can see fer you to tell you did it without it's true, but I'd only believe it if the boy himself rose from the dead and told it."

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"And until then," replied Robert, getting hold of himself, "you will have to take my word for it."

He was calm now, looking fearlessly into the woman's face and trying to convince her with his manner.

"Do you know what Hardy's going to do?" asked the sheriff's wife, watching the handsome face before her. "He's going to spend his time finding out who did this. He says, like I do, that you didn't, and that you're shielding some one."

Robert staggered back, and clutched at the iron railing of his bunk.

"I beg of you, Mrs. Hardy, that if you do care for me as you say, then please let me bear the brunt of it all. I am more than willing to give my life——"

"And we won't let yer, lad; so you might as well leave your friends alone, for they're all going to help yer. Now what do you think Virgie Grey would do without you? She couldn't live and you ought to be ashamed to cause her such grief. I'm a thinking that she be heart-broken over it all."

Robert groaned aloud.

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Oh, if they only knew! Of course, he could never divulge his secret. He believed in his soul that Virgie Grey would come and tell him all about it, confessing her share in the crime. He was anxiously waiting for it. It would make the trial easier to bear if his sweetheart would only confide to him why she had committed the deed.

Now his principal effort would be to keep from the world the secret that he was not his brother's murderer.

"It is of her I am thinking," he said at last. "I love Virgie far too well not to suffer with her. Are you going to let me see her if she comes in, Mrs. Hardy?"

"The sheriff said you might, Robert, if she don't come too late; so I'll just send her in if she happens along."

There seemed to be nothing left to say. The boy had admitted to her that he had committed the deed, although with her woman's intuition she could see that under it all he was trying to hide something.

"You haven't heard from Dick, I suppose,"

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asked Robert, sitting down from sheer exhaustion. "The poor boy, he is having his trouble, too."

Mrs. Hardy looked about cautiously. She could tell Robert that she had seen Dick only a short time before. He would keep her secret.

"His father must never know it,' she began in a low tone, "but poor Dick came to see me, and Robert, my heart is almost broke over him, and now you."

"My dear, poor woman, I pray of you don't weep like that. Dick has always been a good boy. He can't be under this cloud long. With his father's influence he could certainly get off without any trouble, and then he can come back home to his mother."

Robert tried to smile out his sympathy as he proceeded.

"His case is different from mine; a few dollars will make it all right. Don't despair even of him —or me."

And Robert turned his back upon the grated opening and sank down on the bunk.

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Mrs. Hardy could not get the boy from her mind. She loved him as her own son, and what with Dick's trouble, and now this one, her heart was almost broken.

During the evening she gave her convictions to her husband.

"I believe he is as innocent of that murder as my own boy,' she commented as she turned out the light and crawled into bed, "and Luke Hardy, you ain't the man I think you be, if you don't find the man who did that deed."

"And I'll find him," grunted the sheriff as he turned to sleep, "but there ain't no such hope for our boy, only he ain't in such trouble as Robert is. Pretty ticklish business, I can tell you."

With this they both became silent, and for many hours the little woman with a son, and another boy whom she had loved, in the hands of the law, lay thinking of the past days when they were both young and without guile.

The next morning as the sun climbed to its usual height in the sky a girl could be seen emerging from a cottage and turn a right angle along

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the country road. Her face was pale and eyes red with weeping. Nothing could deter the springing step as she walked up the county prison steps and sent a desperate peal of the bell ringing through the house.

Mrs. Hardy drew Virginia Grey into the hall, and kissed the pale face.

"He is here," faltered the girl; "oh, here in this awful place."

"Yes, and you shall see him, the sheriff said that you might. But you must dry your eyes, for he is all broken up himself, and, Virgie, you must be strong."

In vain the girl tried to bring herself to a calmness which she could not feel, but her lip quivered as she followed along after the sheriff's wife, and was pointed out the cell.

"I won't go with you, child," said the woman; "it is better for you to see him alone."

Virgie was peering into the cell which was darkened now by the long curtain which Robert had drawn down to keep out the sun's rays.

"It is I, Robert," she said in a low tone, "Vir-

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gie. I want to tell you that I know well you did not commit that awful deed."

"I knew you would tell me that," replied Robert, putting his fingers through the bars and clasping the small hand in his. "Of course you know."

The girl looked at him curiously.

"I know that you didn't do it," she replied slowly, "and that is enough for me; there must be some other developments before long." Her innocent blue eyes filled Robert with a vague alarm. He had expected to see her bathed in repentant tears, to tell him the whole story and be comforted with the sacrifice that he was willing to make for her sake.

But her very innocence filled him with an unknown dread that he could not explain. Had he made the sacrifice in vain?

Suddenly a thought came to him.

"Virgie," he said, suddenly, "I want you to tell me everything that happened last night; will you?"

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"As near as I can remember," assented the girl; "some of it seems a haze, so much happened."

"I know dear, but won't you try?"

"Earnest came in with the district attorney," began Virgie, "and I heard them talking in the parlor."

"Yes, and then——"

"Then Earnest——" and here the girl hesitated, for she did not want to tell the brother of Earnest's crime, now that he was dead.

"Virgie," put in Robert, "did my brother persecute you at all with his attentions?"

The girl nodded.

"And said things to you he should not?"

Again she inclined her head.

"I want to know all about it and just what you said—and did."

These last few words the man could hardly utter. They meant so much to him—and to her.

"He said that he had more money than you did, and if I would marry him he would give me a beautiful home and everything my heart could

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desire, but I told him I could never love him and that I did love you."

"And then what happened."

Robert was growing more frightened every moment. If this girl had committed that terrible murder, then she was an actress, for not one moment had she betrayed herself.

"He said that you would always be a poor man, and that your heart was not good. Oh, sweetheart, I know that you never killed him, did you? Oh, tell me, Robert."

"Virginia, I must know more what passed between you and my brother," replied Robert.

The matter was becoming serious—too serious for her to trifle with the situation. Even his life, to say nothing of his happiness, hung upon her words.

"Benedict Strong said that Earnest had more worldly goods than you—and—and—he made love to me too, Robert, but I hated them both. For, oh, I loved you. You believe it, don't you?"

"Yes, I believe it, but I wanted to hear you tell me something else."

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"And that is——"

"When you last saw my brother, Earnest."

A frightened expression came into the girl's eyes. Her face lost every drop of color and her lips quivered.

"I saw him dead upon the floor, said that you had committed the the reason that I do not believe just a few moments before I had see there together."

Robert Carlisle groan. Either this g or she was dissembli lieve that the latter w

"And you did not se ment before his death?"

"No, Robert, I did not, lying by the window and b tell it, I knew that you had der. But Robert, I do not bel Why don't you tell me why you was not true?"

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"And that is——"

"When you last saw my brother, Earnest."

A frightened expression came into the girl's eyes. Her face lost every drop of color and her lips quivered.

"I saw him dead upon the floor, just before you said that you had committed the crime. That is the reason that I do not believe you did it, for just a few moments before I had seen the two men there together."

Robert Carlisle sunk upon the bed with a groan. Either this girl was telling him the truth, or she was dissembling. No, no, he could not believe that the latter was the case.

"And you did not see my brother just the moment before his death?"

"No, Robert, I did not, but right after. He was lying by the window and before I had a chance to tell it, I knew that you had confessed to the murder. But Robert, I do not believe that you did it. Why don't you tell me why you said that, when it was not true?"

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Long the man looked into the face of the girl. Then kindly nature sent him into a swoon, and the great form swayed in the air, and Robert Carlisle lay stretched upon the stone floor.

After that he seemed a changed man. He had either made his sacrifice in vain and Virgie was not guilty, as he thought, or she was keeping back her crime from him. In either case he had lost the sweetness of the sacrifice.

Just below the village lay an old mill filled with wheat. The machinery turned on day after day, while at night the place was left alone. Mr. Gid Snileman owned it, and many people shook their heads mysteriously when it was spoken of, for several times in the dead of night screams had been heard to issue from the place, but no one had dared to venture his opinion.

So nightly meetings went on at the mill without any one detecting frauds and crimes.

The night that Robert Carlisle was taken to jail two men could be seen moving about in the inner room of the mill.

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One looked like a gentleman, while the other had the air of a working man.

"Well, this is a pretty turn of affairs, Gid," said the gentleman. "Whoever would have thought this morning that Robert Carlisle would be in prison to-night and Earnest dead?"

"It's all the better for you, sir," replied the miller; "now when the young upstart is gone you can claim——"

"The insurance, I suppose you mean. No, I can't do that, but I can dicker with Robert about it and get him to sign them over to me; then maybe there will be some show for the money. Gid, do you ever hear funny noises about this place?"

"Only since the old man died here," replied Gid, looking cautiously about. "I tell you a man is a fool that will break up his sleep and rest for nothing. Now when I want money I want it quick. You've got the good cards in your hand and I want my share."

Just then a peculiar noise came from an inner room and both men sprang to their feet.

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CHAPTER IV.

"DID you hear that?" whispered Gid, softly.

"Did I hear it?" replied Strong, who was the gentleman, also district attorney; "I should think so. This is the spookiest place I ever was in. I'd never come here only it's the safest one I know of and we've got too big a game on now to be finicky about spooks. My Heavens! what's that?"

Both stopped, for wheat came tumbling down the shaft at their feet.

"It's rats," grunted Gid. "What a fool I was not to think of that before; besides, no one could possibly get in here without my knowing it—the outer windows are all too high."

Suddenly a light, ghastly laugh broke upon their ears.

"'Tis the foolish brat," gasped Gid. "How in the world did he get in here?"

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Just at this juncture the flopping little head of Croonie peeped out from a wheat bin.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Strong, taking hold of the collar of the child's coat and jerking him out and roughly standing him on his feet.

"I didn't come here to see you's," sniffled Croonie. "I just came down to see the lightning, and the bugs. Sometimes they get in my head. Say, be you my father?"

The child changed his attitude completely as he said these last words. He was eagerly watching Strong's face.

"Shut your little mouth, you fool," growled the lawyer; "as if I had to father such a thing as you are."

"You made me a thing," replied the child, backing away and looking about for a chance to escape. "I didn't drop myself when I was a little brat, did I? All the boys say you're my dad, and I'm so sorry."

"Who told you I was your dad, did you say?"

"Well, all the boys told me so, and I believe

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what they say, too. They call me Silly Simple. What does that mean?"

"It means that the boys are all idiots and that you're the biggest in the lot."

"Oh, it does, does it? Well, I asked Aunt Margaret if you was my pa and she just cried and said my mother died awful hard, and not to ask her any questions."

Strong stood looking down upon the child. There was everything about the little fellow that seemed to be all one could desire in a boy. But the intense jargon that often fell from his lips made one's blood run cold.

Only the absent mind at times indicated the child's condition. Any father would be proud to claim him were his brains but normal.

"What would you do if I were your father?" asked Strong, curiously.

"Why, nothin', course, I wouldn't; only I'd like to know, and I'd try to be a better man than you."

"Why do you think I'm not good?" asked Strong, his face darkening.

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"Because there are bats in my head," answered Croonie, "and lizards in my stomach. Course you couldn't be a good man when that was so, could you?"

There was a wise expression on the child's face that baffled the man watching him so closely.

"What's the use of wasting time talking to that brat?" whined Gid. "We have something else to do. Now then, old man, send the child away. Why, it's after ten, and little owls ought to be in bed long ago."

Croonie took this for a hint and turned toward the door. If the men had been looking they would have seen him glancing into the shadows behind them. But he did not wait long, and in a moment was scurrying up the road.

"They didn't know that I was a looking for him,' he soliloquized as he scampered along. "I want to give him this knife. He couldn't find it that night. But Croonie found it, king dear, and you shall have it before any one can get it from me. Funny that the point is broken off."

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As he ran he took the knife from his pocket and looked it over in the moonlight.

"Ough," gasped he, his blue eyes shining with fear; "the blood frightens me to death. If it wasn't for the lizards in my brain I'd be so lonesome."

Poor little mite of humanity, with but few friends and no real comfort.

If the man left behind in the mill, who well knew that he was the child's father, had had any heart in his body for the frailty of human life he would have pitied the child whose life had been ruined by his own heartlessness.

"I ain't so 'fraid when the moon shines," he whispered as he rounded the corner of his home; "but the night is so dark when the moon goes down and the world is asleep."

He stopped a moment, and then crept like a small animal, into the house.

The men at the mill were silent after the boy had gone for fully five minutes. Gid spat his tobacco across the room and refused to open his lips

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until he saw that Strong was engrossed in his thoughts. Then he spoke.

"Is the brat yours?"

The attorney gave him a look of displeasure.

"Maybe; who can tell his own child?"

"You knew the mother?"

"Yes."

"And is she dead?"

"Yes."

"Did you kill her?"

Again the district attorney gave the man an indignant glance.

"Am I on the witness stand I'd like to know, Gid? If not, then I ask you to shut up. I don't feel like being questioned."

"I should think you wouldn't after having been father to an idiot."

Gid spat again and then waited for his companion to speak.

"We neither of us, Gid, ought to use sarcasm to the other. Your own skirts are covered with blood."

"The same sticking to yours," put in Gid.

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"Possibly," replied the attorney, "and all the more reason that we should be friends. There, now, Gid, shut up until you can say something agreeable."

"Fire ahead. What are your plans, then? Are you going to prove this against Robert Carlisle?"

"If it is the last thing I ever do in life," snapped Strong. "His life is as good as gone."

"Better knock on wood," put in the miller, "for there's many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip."

"Shut your croaking, Gid," angrily replied Strong; "you have never heard me say that I was going to do a thing, and then not do it, have you? Well, you hear me say that Robert Carlisle is yonder hanging by the neck and I, Benedict Strong, put him there."

Gid started and looked about as if he expected to see a man hanging by his neck. He laughed a little.

"It will mean a few thousand in our pocket if you get along well," he said at last; "but you will have to get him to sign over the policies."

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"That's easy enough done; you watch me, and follow suit."

If these two men, amply certain that they were to have their own way in everything pertaining to the human lives now in their hands, could have looked ahead they would have shuddered at the sight.

But fortunate for men that the curtain of the future is tightly held down so that no eye can see coming events.

Dick Hardy, after leaving his father's home the night of his conversation with his mother, made for the old mill. There he installed himself in one of the unused bins until such a time that he could meet Earnest Carlisle face to face. When in the afternoon he had gotten into such a state of mind that he could stay in hiding no longer, he made his way to Mrs. Weatherby's home. There the tragedy happened and he again escaped, leaving no trace of his coming save a slight picture in the mind of the crazy boy.

Croonie knew that Dick was there and had followed his instructions about taking up the knife

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that had ended the life of Earnest. The other piece was in the hands of the law and the sheriff knew that when he found the other part of the knife he would know who the murderer was, and that in spite of Robert's confession there was another who must swing for the deed.

After a long consultation in which Gid demanded money for what he had already done, the two men left the mill, and not long after they had gone a figure could be seen crawling from one of the lower openings.

"Well, would you ever believe that Benedict Strong would be hobnobbing with the miller? There is something doing, all right, and I'll keep my ears open. This is a dandy place to hide."

Dick looked about and then made his plans. He would stay in the neighborhood until he had secured his knife from Croonie and then go away with his mother's help. Until then he was safe in the mill.

At the slightest sound outside he would immediately go into hiding, only to emerge again as soon as he thought the danger had passed. He

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told Croonie to meet him at the mill, that he would be there for a week and he could remember many a time having given the child money, and now he was being repaid by the boy helping him out of his difficulty. He wanted the knife, and wanted it bad, for it had his initials upon the handle. The events of the night were indistinct in his mind, but he knew well that he had not committed that murder, but who the guilty man was he could not tell. During the scrimmage his knife had been drawn from his fingers and he had lost it. He had gotten word to his mother to bring him food and he knew that he would not suffer for want. He shuddered as he thought of his father, and yet there was a feeling in the boy's heart that his parent loved him even if he did follow up his trail. This emotion was accompanied by one of respect, for he knew that duty compelled the dear old dad to bring his son to justice.

He expected his mother every moment with food, but she did not dare to venture into the mill in the sunlight. Suddenly Dick heard the creep-

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ing sound of footsteps and Mrs. Hardy's face appeared at the window and Dick could see a perfect outline through the small flicker of his candle light.

"It seems, Dick," began Mrs. Hardy through her tears after the first greetings were over, "that I cannot live unless you can come home with me. And Robert's trouble. Oh, Dick, you didn't do it, did you?"

"What trouble?" questioned Dick, apprehensively.

"Robert has confessed to killing his brother Earnest, and he is in prison."

Dick paled perceptibly, but the mother thought it was because of his love for his friend.

"Robert did not commit that murder," he said with emphasis.

"But he says that he did," put in Mrs. Hardy, "and I worried for fear——"

"I know that he didn't," replied Dick, and the cry from his mother drew him closer to her.

"No, mother, it was not I," he insisted, reassuring her with a close pressure, "but who it was I

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cannot tell, but I know that it was not Robert. I was angry enough at the dead man to have put him out of the world, but I did not kill him."

"Dick, you would tell your mother if it were you, would you not?"

"Mother, I can only say this: that I did not kill Earnest Carlisle. I ask you to believe me. You do not think me coward enough to allow my own dearest friend to lose his life for my crime."

"Virginia Grey is heart-broken over Robert's imprisonment," said Mrs. Hardy, "and she swears, with the rest of his friends, that she knows he is innocent. I must go now, Dick; it must be nearly midnight and if your father should miss me I don't know what I could tell him. I must get into the house before he discovers my absence."

The next day Robert sent for Croonie to come to the prison. He had seen the scurrying little figure speed through the shadows the terrible night of his brother's murder, and he felt in his heart that the child knew something about it. The

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crazy child stood beside the cell door peeping in with large widening eyes.

"Does they keep you in such a little house, Robert?" he inquired, thrusting his fingers in through the railing that Robert might touch them. "With all the earth and sky you might have more. If you could live in my head now, you're welcome."

Croonie stopped and waited for Robert to speak.

"Croonie, I want to ask you something, and I want you to be truthful above all things. You remember the night my brother was killed. You were in the house then?"

"Yes, I was," replied the child, "and I am so glad that he is dead."

"Hush, child, I did not want you to say that."

"But I am, for he was worse than the lizards that wriggle in my heart, and I saw him killed, too."

"Croonie, did you see him murdered, on your soul of honor? God will not love little boys who tell stories."

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"I ain't tellin' no story," replied Croonie, "and he was a evil man. He were a goin' to hurt my good lady."

"What good lady, Miss Virginia?"

"Yes, I heard him tell her that you didn't have no money and that she must love him, and now that he is dead she can't love him no more."

"Well, will you tell me who murdered my brother?"

"No siree, I won't. I promised I wouldn't, and if I should I couldn't go to sleep to-night, for the bugs what would run around in my head."

"Then you will not tell me so that I can get out of prison?"

Croonie hesitated and then with a sly wink of his eye:

"You said you did it, Mr. Robert; if you didn't what did you tell it for then?"

"I wanted to shield the real person, Croonie."

"The beautiful lady?" asked the child.

Robert nodded his head.

With a wild frantic cry the child ran from the cell and out into the street. People were used to

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seeing him in this condition, so no one paid any attention to the screaming child as he rounded the corner of the Weatherby home, and, reaching his aunt Margaret he buried his head in her lap and wept many bitter tears. Down in the little pocket was a blood-covered knife and on the handle engraved in silver were the initials that would tell who the real murderer of Earnest Carlisle was.

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CHAPTER V.

ZABI TUCKER had been the keeper of the cemetery for many years. He had seen three of his wives buried there without much emotion, for women were easy for Zabi to obtain. The older he grew the more he realized his own charms. His one little daughter, Trephenie, had been left to grow up as wild as the flowers she picked in the meadows. Zabi had never forced her to go to school, and thus at the age of twelve she was a great gawky girl without training and caring for nothing but boyish sports. Zabi had confided in his daughter that he intended to marry the strong Margaret, who had been servant so many years for Mrs. Weatherby. The town had been stirred to its depths by the disappearance of the old gentleman, who had been a landmark for almost half a century. Then had come Dick Hardy's crime,

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and now Robert Carlisle. Old Zabi thought of all these things as he trudged along through the dusk, making his way to the old mill near where some gigantic machines were being erected. He had been employed to watch them for the next three weeks, and the work had come in just at the time when the old fellow needed the money. He whispered to his daughter that with the little extra he would buy a new ring for Margaret, for the old one in the trunk, used by his former wives was getting green and ugly looking. As he passed the mill the owner thrust his uncouth-looking head through the aperture.

"Hello, there Gid, what yer doin' here so late?"

"Hello yourself and see how you like it. Hear you're going to work for the new minin' company. Quit grave digging?"

"Nope."

"Pretty busy now?"

"Nope, only one grave in the last two weeks, and that was for Earnest Carlisle. Good job he's gone, too. What's your opinion about that

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thing?" asked Zabi later. "'Tain't one in a hundred that thinks Rob Carlisle did that."

Gid looked out curiously from under his shaggy brows.

"Well, your opinion won't free the lad," said he, "and I know that he killed him."

"Oh, you're a fool, Gid," put in Zabi, "and a tarnation one at that. Now where that knife went to is more'n any one can tell. Wouldn't Robert Carlisle give it up if he had it? There's only one little piece, and that was taken from the heart of Earnest."

"Well, you jest wait until Strong gets after that Robert; he won't know where he's standing."

Gid spat viciously as he said this, and Zabi turned to him curiously. The small lamp hanging on the wall gave a flickering light and the grave digger could see a certain emotion working in his companion's face.

"I thought you were that kind of a fellow," he said at last. "I kin tell you one thing: I never dug a grave free in all my life, but I'd be willin'

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to do that for Strong. He's a treacherous son-of-a-gun."

Zabi relieved himself of this bit of feeling and waited for Gid to say something.

"What was that noise outside?" gasped Gid, hearing a scream which sent the blood curdling to each man's heart.

"It's the daffy fellow," replied Zabi, "and he's to be part of my own family after a while. I'm going to marry his aunt."

Just at this moment the child shoved his head through the mill door.

"What do you want here, you fool?" asked Gid, sharply. "This ain't your property."

"Nor yours either," sharply replied Croonie, "if ther truth was known. My lizards told me t'other day that everything you have you stole."

"You get out of here, you sassy brat," shouted Gid, "or I'll knock your head off."

"Don't do that, Gid, because the child told you the truth," put in the grave digger.

"'Tain't the truth. I never stole nothin' in my life, and if that little crazy rat comes 'round here

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yelling like a red Indian, I'll fix him so he won't bother any one no more."

Croonie shook his head wisely.

"I ain't afraid of you, miller," he snickered; "but when I tell you what I know then you'll be afraid of me. Ain't so sure you won't think I'm right."

"Come here, Croonie, and tell me what you know," coaxed Zabi; "you see I'm your friend."

Croonie crawled near the grave digger.

"Robert Carlisle got out of prison and no one knows how, but it may be the lizards in my head let him out. What do you think?"

"Do you mean that the boy has escaped?" asked Zabi, getting up excitedly.

"That's what I mean, and he's apt to come over here at any minute."

Zabi would have thought that the lizards in the child's brain were speaking had it not been for a white face that appeared at the door and Robert Carlisle sped into the mill.

Virgie had been instrumental in helping her lover to escape. She wanted Robert to get away

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from the country, believing him innocent of murder, and so, with the cunning of the haunted, she secured the keys from the sheriff's wife and Robert Carlisle stood a free man, but they both knew the fierceness of the sheriff, and both dreaded for him to find out the escape.

"Go to the mill, Robert, and stay there," persuaded the girl, "and when it has blown over a little I will help you go away, and dear heart, I will go with you."

The young man held the girl passionately to his breast, and he could not believe her guilty of his brother's death and he had not dared to tell her his own convictions. He was eager to go away, to commence life anew. He had not committed a crime; in his heart he knew this, and life in another country with Virgie offered him so much happiness that he could not but take his freedom from her hands. As he bounded along the road toward the mill he thought he saw a light there. He was sure that Gid stood in with the district attorney who had been such a friend of his brother's, and he felt sure that the miller

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would hand him over to the law. But he did not dare to wait even to assure himself whether the owner was there or not, for out over the night pealed the town bell, which told the citizens that a prisoner had escaped.

Zabi was on his feet in an instant.

"Boy!" he exclaimed, with real emotion in his voice; "what have you done? They are tolling the bell for you."

"Yes, and hide me, Zabi, or you, Gid, will you?"

"You bet I will, and Gid, if you dare to squeal, I'll dig that grave for you I spoke of."

Gid turned his nose up at the threat.

"I ain't going to have no criminal living in my mill," he replied sulkily, "and don't you forget it. I'll hand him over to the law."

He would have been as good as his word had it not been for the commotion outside telling of the gathering of citizens who had followed Robert the short distance to the mill, and could hear the baying of the bloodhounds and the sheriff ordering the men to hold back the dogs until he came out.

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Robert felt that it was all up, and he stood defiantly looking about him as the sheriff entered.

"Robert," spoke up the man of law, "I'm surprised that you have taken this step. Your friends all believe that you are innocent of this crime. But you make yourself look guilty."

"I want to go away, Luke," replied the prisoner, "to another place. It would not hurt you to allow me to go if, as you say, you do not think I killed my brother."

"But, Robert, you have confessed. And it is my duty to hold you until you are proven innocent.

"You will all please vacate this place while I interview the prisoner."

The sheriff had such a manner of authority that the men slouched away.

"Robert," he began, with a tremor in his voice, "you know, lad, for the sake of Dick I would do anything I could for you, but my office demands that I put you again under arrest."

"Then why don't you let me go? I can get away without your being implicated."

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"Hush boy, I have a better plan. I am not going to take you back right away to the prison, for I have a certain clue which will give you your freedom. Until then I shall keep you here, relying upon your honor not to go away."

"But I would go, sheriff, if I had the chance," replied Robert looking squarely into the sheriff's face.

"I shall trust you, however, but so that you won't be tempted too far I shall turn the key in the lock of the tool-house near here, where we have often held prisoners when the county jail was too full."

"What is your clue?" asked Robert.

"The point of the knife, which you never had in your hand," answered the sheriff blithely. "I am going to run down that other person, be he the crown prince of Russia."

"Sheriff," said Robert, eagerly, "I had hoped you would let it go that I was the man that did the deed. If you have any friendship for me you will seek no evidence against any one else."

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"Then you must explain why you are shielding some one."

"I cannot now, but maybe some day it will all come out right."

The murmur could still be heard outside.

The sheriff stepped to the door.

"Boys," he called, "go home now. I have the young fellow all right, and he won't try any such a thing as this again. He feels keenly the disgrace of staying in a murderer's cell, and for the sake of his family I am going to try a lighter method. So thanking you all fer helpin' me here, I bid you all good night."

Again the dignity of the sheriff's bearing brought a murmur from the crown. One after another they turned away and sought the rest of their homes.

Then the sheriff brought the young man out, and, taking a key from his pocket, he opened a near-by building, which looked more like a small coop than a machine shop.

"I hate to do it, old fellow," he said as Robert walked in, "but I hope shortly to have the guilty

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man behind the bars and you in your home. I'm putting you here to keep you from seeing your aunt. She is heart-broken, lad."

"I know that, Hardy, and so is Virgie. Heaven knows it's for them I suffer."

Neither man saw that several pair of eyes were watching out of the shadow.

"Oh, they have taken him," whispered one of the watchers. "Well, they will not keep him long. I pray the good Father in Heaven to watch over my boy."

Virginia saw the sheriff shake hands with Robert, shove him into the city tool-house and turn the lock upon him.

Another voice croaked out of the darkness.

"If Mr. Robert had pigeon wings like I have he wouldn't need to stay in such holes. And little silly Croonie knows more than the big brained men. He knows how to fly to the stars."

Croonie scrambled out as he said this and pulled at the sheriff's coat-tails.

"What are you doing with him," asked the

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child, jerking his thumb in the direction of the tool-house.

"Hush, boy, no one is to know he is there. You always liked Mr. Robert, didn't you?"

"Yes, always. He don't hit me on my cocoanut, and gives me pennies for candy."

"Then run along and don't tell any one you saw me lock him here."

"I won't," replied the child, "and I won't show any one my bloody knife either. Now wouldn't you like that knife?"

"Will you let me see it?" asked the sheriff, a sudden thought coming into his mind. "I'll give you twenty-five cents."

"That much money is a lot," answered the daft boy, "but I ain't going to forgit that I promised to give the knife to some one else and to let no one see it till then." With this he went closer to the man and whispered: "It's all blood, and you can't guess where I got it."

"You were in the house the night Carlisle was murdered, and that's where you got it. Give it to me, boy."

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"I shan't! I shan't! I'm going to give it to the man that owns it."

"You must give it to me, child; it is evidence and I must have it."

Saying this he crushed the child in his arms and began searching the small pockets. Pulling out an old knife he fitted the broken bit to the point. His face beamed with pleasure.

"Robert is as good as acquitted," he muttered, then his eyes rested on the child.

"Boy," he remarked, as Croonie was sniveling for his lost weapon, "take the knife and give it to whom you please. I don't care. Here is your twenty-five cents. Are you going to return it to-night?"

"Yes," grinned Croonie, as he pocketed the knife and money, "When the world sleeps somebody else will have this knife."

"Do I know him, Croonie?" wheedled the sheriff.

"No, only the lizards in my head know who he is; so there, I'm going away now."

"Let him go," muttered the sheriff. "I will fol-

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low him, and if he goes home, then again, in the morning I will be on his trail. On the whole I believe I will put some one to watch the child. In the daytime there is no fear that he will go to the murderer, and I have as good as got my man."

He watched the daft child until he saw him go into the Weatherby home, and then returned to the mill.

A girl glided from the tall shadow of a tree as the sheriff made his retreat. Virginia Grey was determined that her lover should go free.

"Robert is in that place," she cried to herself, "and I am sure I could open the door. I'll bet Zabi has keys to it."

She walked about the tool-house and at last put her lips to the keyhole.

"Robert," she whispered, "it's Virgie."

"And are you alone?" came back the answer from the imprisoned man.

"Yes."

"What are you doing here?"

"Pass me out an axe, dear, or some tool that I

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can pry this lock with. Hurry, Robert; any one might happen along at any moment."

"But, sweetheart——"

"Don't wait to talk about it, Rob, dear. I tell you there might, at any time, something happen so I could not help you. There, that's it—a hammer."

She drew a large sledge-hammer through the small grating and was about to lift it to knock the lock from the door, when a footstep behind her arrested her arm.

"What are you doing here, miss, at this time of night?" asked a voice, and Zabi looked curiously at the girl. "This is a time of spooks and what nots. First the sheriff takes a young man away and sticks him somewhere when our backs are all turned, then you appear with a hammer in your hand. Have you any designs on that door, my dear?"

Virginia knew that the grave digger realized what she intended to do, so she said boldly:

"Uncle Zabi, you have known me ever since I

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was a baby, and if you have a key to this tool-house, will you loan it to me?"

"I can't miss, much as I would like to, and I know how your poor little heart is a-beating, for Zabi ain't such a fool as he looks."

"Then give me the key, Zabi, and I'll give you a kiss."

"Gosh, I'll do that in a minute," replied the susceptible Zabi.

"But I ain't got no right to do nothin' like that, but for a kiss you might rob my pocket."

Virginia threw her arms about the man's neck and gave him a sounding kiss. Then she put her hand in his trouser pocket and drew out a long brass key.

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CHAPTER VI.

Virgie's heart beat high with anticipation, and she would free her lover and flee the country with him, and as quick as a flash she had the door opened and Robert bounded out.

She recoiled back as she saw the handcuffs upon his hands.

"Quick," she cried, "don't lose an instant. The midnight train stops at the junction and you are to take it. Go away and I'll follow. We could live in Europe as well as here."

Robert's heart thrilled with delight, and he wanted to be free, and especially now that he knew that Virginia was not guilty of the crime he was charged with.

"File, Virgie, I can't get away with these on."

She darted into the tool house.

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As she ventured out with the instrument in her fingers she saw the shadow of a man glide from behind the tool-house. Before she had time to think Benedict Strong was facing them.

"Ah, so you thought you could escape, did you, Robert? Well, let me tell you that fate is against you. Nothing now can save you from the gallows. Miss Grey, don't you know that it is against the law to help free a criminal?"

"I don't care, and oh, won't you go away and leave us alone? I love Robert, so much, and if I am ever to be his wife I can't have him in prison. And he didn't commit that murder, and you know it."

"Such talk won't go down with me, my pretty miss," replied the district attorney; "so you might as well send him into the tool-house again."

"I am a prisoner here in the hands of the sheriff," said Robert, haughtily,, "and not of the district attorney; let me assure you of that, Mr. Strong. You may leave here now."

"I am here to speak with this young lady,"

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replied Strong. "I will talk with you when I convict you and send you to——"

"That you will never do," cried Virginia. "God is too good to allow such a thing."

"You had better place that man back under lock and key."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall arrest you as his accomplice," answered the attorney.

"You're a beastly coward, Strong," shouted Robert, "to bully a woman."

"And you are a fool," retorted the attorney. "Here is a kick for you."

Before Virginia could prevent him the man of the law had slapped her lover across his face, and the shackled hands could not prevent the assault.

"You would not dare to do such a thing if I were free," gasped Robert. "Oh, to have the use of my hands for a few moments!"

"That you will never do while you have breath in your body. When you cease to breathe, then your lady-love here will have the opportunity of

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folding them across your lifeless body, and I shall have one more feather in my professional crown."

"Oh, how dare you!" sobbed Virgie. "I believe—and here I want you to listen to what I say—I believe that the time will come when you will be behind the bars for this crime yourself. There, now, you may take that for what it is worth."

"Which is not a cent," cried the attorney. "Now, back into the tool-house."

Robert was not able to help himself, his shackled hands keeping him under the control of the other man. He felt himself bodily thrown into his prison and heard the door closed upon him.

"Now, then," cried Strong, as he snapped the lock, "I want that key."

"I won't give it to you," retorted Virgie. "I want you to listen to me."

"I won't listen or hear you speak a word until I get that key. There, now, you may speak, miss," and Strong placed the brass key in his pocket.

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"I must understand you," cried the girl. "I want his life and you his——"

"Death," snapped Strong. "But you have it in your power to free him."

"How?"

"By giving yourself to me. I want you, I always have; in fact, I shall never be a happy man until I hold you in my arms."

"That can never be," sobbed Virgie. "I love him; you wouldn't want me to come to you, loving him with my whole heart."

"I want you any way, I don't care how. I will make you love me after he is gone. You cannot help it. I shall give you all the beauties of the world, everything a woman could desire, and what more can I say?"

Robert snorted from the inside, as he could plainly hear the words, and they stung him like adders upon the tender flesh.

"Oh, will all the heavenly angels help me to be free!" he cried, with pain. "I will protect you, child."

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"Then I understand that you demand a sacrifice of me that his life might be spared?"

Strong nodded. Virgie's voice was so low that she hoped Robert would not hear her.

"Yes, yes; will you do so much for him? I want you, with or without your love—I care not."

"No, no, I cannot."

With the desperation of one without hope she threw herself upon the ground and sobbed out her agony.

"Then the law may take its course," replied the lawyer. "I offer him one more chance through you."

Into Virgie's mind flooded the thoughts of the past.

She arose quickly to her feet.

"You will set him free, or I will proclaim you a murderer."

"What!"

"It is your safety for his freedom. Listen to me: I know that the old uncle of Robert disappeared and that he was lured to this mill. I know by whom. And I also know that he was

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thrown over the wheel and killed, and that you are his murderer. Now, then, will you give me his life for your liberty?"

"You dare to speak a word of this," replied the district attorney, in a low voice, "and I'll kill you. Do you hear? And, besides, you have no proof, no way of showing that what you say is true. Where did you hear this?"

"From your own lips, as you told it to Earnest Carlisle. So, now will you listen to me? Give me that key."

"Never."

"Then I shall inform the sheriff."

"Not yet," replied the attorney, in a low, sinister tone. "I know a man who would as soon put you out of the way as he did the old fossil. Gid, Gid, are you in there?"

The miller came out, rubbing his eyes.

"This girl knows that we killed Rob's uncle."

"And is she going to tell?"

"It looks like it."

"Then she shall go after him over the wheel."

"Stop," reasoned Strong; "put her in the mill

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until she either comes to our terms or refuses, and it will be time to use violence then."

Gid dragged the helpless Virgie into the mill. She could hear Robert pounding on the door with his shackled hands.

"What shall I do?" gasped Strong. "What a fool I was to tell that story to Earnest. The old adage is that walls have ears, and I believe it is true. She was the rustling behind the curtain.

"Gid," he cried, as the miller appeared, "you take these policies and take care of them, for God's sake. Put them in the safe, and after Robert Carlisle is dead we will get the money."

"I'll take them home," responded the miller; "and I'd like to see the devil get them after they are once in the old woman's hands."

The town seemed to be in a terrible uproar. Strong had seen shadows flit by time and again, when on a normal night every honest citizen would be resting in his bed.

Zabi, he knew, was dozing now at his post near the machinery, and the hours were running on toward midnight.

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His brain was all in a whirl with excitement. That so many things should happen in one night was more than he would ever have imagined. The tool-house held the man he hated. The imprisoned girl in the mill he loved, but she held a deadly secret against him which would put him in prison for life or might entangle his neck in the hangman's noose.

He saw two figures coming up the long, white road, and a woman's dress disclosed their sex.

He leaned back against a tree and waited.

Margaret and Zabi's daughter rounded the corner.

"What are you doing here?" growled the attorney.

"Same question to yourself," cried the woman. "I'm bringing my lover a bite to eat, and in the meantime seeing the sight. The bell a-ringing made the whole town get up."

"And I suppose, like a woman, you couldn't sleep unless you had your nose in. Zabi's out there by the machines."

"What if he is," retorted Margaret; "any busi-

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ness of yours? Don't hurry away; your company is so delightful."

The man had been fingering a certain little steel key hanging to a chain. Trephenie saw it fall and immediately picked it up.

"You must give that to me," said Strong, noticing that he no longer had the key. "I must have it."

"I don't think so," laughed Trephenie, "'cause it is such a pretty little key."

"I'll knock your head off if you don't give it to me," shouted Strong. But Margaret stepped in between the angry man and the child and held up her hand.

"Don't touch her——"

"No, 'cause I'm going to be her child," put in Trephenie. "My father is going to marry her, and long 's she ain't go no children of her own, then I'm to be her only one, ain't I?"

"Don't tell all you know, child," replied the big-hearted woman; but she fondly smoothed the tangled hair and lifted the small, dirty fingers between her own.

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Strong wanted them to go away, as he feared that Virgie would make known her presence in the mill, and this he dreaded most of all.

The miller, hearing voices, came out of the mill, and seeing Margaret, said:

"Oh, so you couldn't even let him work nights without followin' him up. Well, he's over there by the machines, I suppose, a-sleepin', and the sooner you get off my premises the better it will suit me."

"Well, you needn't be sassy, need you?"

"I ain't bein' sassy, but I'll tell you right now that I won't have you on this place. I don't care whether you are a woman or not," and he slipped off his coat and let it fall to the ground.

"I'll be a-puttin' my hands on you, Miss Margaret."

"I don't think you will," said a newcomer, and Zabi placed his big form in front of his lady-love. "I'll be a-takin' off me own coat," and suiting the action to the words the man threw his coat to the floor. The trouble was over in a moment, and when the grave-digger again picked up his coat

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to put in on some kindly fate slipped his arms into that of Gid's coat, and he drew Margaret and his child after him to the place where he was to watch through the night.

Strong's face by this time was the color of marble. He did not believe that fate could turn against him, but so many of those who were his enemies seemed to be trailing about after him.

Suddenly he saw near the tool-house a large keg of powder. It was used for blasting, and if he could only get it inside he would be able to blow Robert Carlisle into the next world without any trouble. But how to do it. He could not lift it by himself. He would ask Zabi to help him.

But he had counted without his host. Zabi laughed loudly at the idea of his handling powder that might blow him into kingdom come without his own consent.

"It strikes me," replied Zabi to Strong's request, "that it would be a good plan for you to tug it into the tool-house yourself." He said this between the bites of Margaret's pie.

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"That's just it, Zab," cried Strong. "I am afraid."

"And yet you want me to risk my life. Well, I'm not doin' that, I can tell you."

Strong went again into the mill. He dared not leave, knowing that the presence of Virginia might be discovered. And then he feared that Robert might escape. It meant much to his future to get these two people out of the way and keep them out. But how to do it?

Gid was sitting on an old, unused bin.

"We're in a devil of a fix, Strong," said he, drawing his shaggy brows together, "and there doesn't seem to be any way out, as I can see, either."

"Watch me," replied Strong; "I don't intend to let my enemies get the best of me. There's that man in the tool-house, and the girl—where is she?"

"Back in there, locked in a closet. I thought of putting her down the shute and let the wheat down upon her, but I didn't dare without asking you."

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I wouldn't do that," responded Strong, shud-
ing; "there must be some way to bring her
erms without killing her. I have a little plan
ch might do. Now, let me think."

f these two men had known that Zabi was at
t moment making a great discovery they
uld have shaken in their shoes. But Gid, so
, had not noticed his loss.

Zabi took the bunch of papers in his hand. He
n poked about in the other pockets. Evidently
had struck the wrong coat, but, not being ten-
r in his conscience, Zabi proceeded to look the
pers over, and his eyes grew larger and larger
he read. Then with a grunt he emptied the
ıer pockets.

There was Gid's old pipe and a bag of tobacco.
letter which was old and worn, with ragged
ges, followed, with the name of the miller upon

Zabi allowed two or three whistles to issue
m his lips. Then he took up the bundle of
pers again and looked at them.

'Policies on the life of old Carlisle," he said, in
undertone, and leaning closer to his lantern.

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"What does it mean? There has been some crooked work going on. Zabi, you are a lucky boy to be able to handle the money."

He leaned back and closed his eyes, and muttered over to himself the amounts of the policies. He saw that they were made out to Robert Carlisle and that the young man was the sole beneficiary.

He knew the coat Gid had worn was the clue which would free Robert Carlisle from the hangman's noose and give back to the suffering Virginia her sweetheart.

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CHAPTER VII.

DICK had been listening to every word that had been uttered in the old mill. He could peek through the crack of the bin and see the old miller moving about, and he heard the conversation between Gid and the district attorney. He had been waiting for Croonie to come and give him the knife, but the boy had not been able to accomplish it.

The night after Zabi had discovered the policies Dick was waiting for the coming of the boy, and the miller had kept an eagle eye upon the room where Virgie had been hidden, for he feared that she might be discovered. If he had known of Dick's presence he would in all probability have treated the young fellow as he had Robert's uncle.

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At this time, on the morning after the imprisoning of Rob in the tool-house, Dick was waiting for Croonie's appearance. It was Sunday morning, and he realized that the boy might take this opportunity to bring him the tell-tale knife. He had not dared to tell his mother of his fear, and rested his hope upon the idiot child returning him the initialed knife.

The church bells had not ceased tolling for the gathered children to file into Sunday-school when the sheriff could be seen coming from his home and casting his eyes over the multitude of little ones waiting in line at the church door.

He saw standing with his head high in the air and a consequential expression on his pretty face the imbecile boy Croonie.

The sheriff waited about until the school was called and then secreted himself and waited for their dismissal.

He had not waited long when he saw the door open slightly and a small, curly head protrude itself through the opening.

Croonie looked about suspiciously, and then,

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without waiting for another glance, he darted from the church and sped down the road toward the old mill.

In an instant the sheriff was after him. Hardy could scarcely keep up with the small flying feet, but he succeeded in rounding the corner as the child slid into the building, where Dick was seated upon a box turned bottom up.

"There! I bet nobody saw me a-coming here, all right. I left Miss Brown a-telling the boys about how Moses was found in the bullrushes. Mighty interesting, and I wish I could have stayed, but I thought I could see you now and give you this."

"Then no one followed you, boy?" cried Dick.

"No; but, you see, the bats in my brain kept a-flitting against the walls, and it made me sick. Hark! what was that?"

"Nothing," replied Dick, pricking up his ears. "I hope——"

He had not finished the sentence when the door burst open, and he had just time to slip into a dark wheat bin when the sheriff entered.

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"Croonie," began Hardy, "where is the man you were talking to?"

"I wasn't talking to no one, but just to myself and what's a running about in my head."

Hardy heard the rustling in the bin and turned his attention toward it, and with a determined expression upon his face he pointed his revolver into the darkness. Dick felt a twinge and knew that the bullet had lodged in his flesh, and he sprang up, for he feared another would take his life. He lifted a large board from the bin and lodged it squarely over the head of the sheriff.

As he stepped out from the darkness he saw his father stretched out upon the floor.

"Poor dad," he murmured, softly. "I simply had to do it. He can't be dead. He will come to, but my mother will never forgive me."

He raised his head like a hunted animal, and then the sound of some one running along the road sent him back into hiding.

Benedict Strong had also missed his usual Sunday morning church and with a guilty conscience turned his face toward the mill. He heard the

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shot fired and his steps had sent Dick into hiding again.

Gid also hurried to the scene, having met Croonie on the road running for home.

"Better go and see what's going on at your mill," cried the boy, and he was off again.

Gid and Strong entered the mill together.

"I heard a shot fired from here," cried the attorney, "but there doesn't seem to be any one about. My heaven! here's the sheriff."

Together they raised the insensible man in their arms and took him into the air. He was revived on the journey home toward the prison, as Strong had placed him in a huckster's wagon and sent him to his wife.

The two remaining men could not solve the puzzle, but that the sheriff had not shot himself was a self-evident fact.

"Where is the girl?" asked Strong, after they had talked the situation over.

"Where I left her, and she can't move hand or foot. What are you going to do with her?"

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"That's what I came back for," replied Strong, slowly. "I've got to settle with her."

"I'm a-thinkin' we're up against it with her," answered Gid, spitting at a knot in a board at some distance. "You see, if we keep her here we will have all the neighborhood out after her, and if we let her go she will tell upon us."

"You needn't worry about that, Gid," snapped Strong. "There is no danger of her getting away from us, now that we have her in our power, but I wish the girl would consent to become my wife, and then all the trouble would be ended."

He said this last as if to himself, and, although Gid looked at him curiously, he did not speak. He had known all along that the attorney was in love with Virgie, but he also knew what a temper Strong had, so he remained discreetly silent.

"You go and send her to me," said Strong, suddenly. "I'll bring her to terms some way. I suppose Robert Carlisle is still in the tool-house, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"All the better, for with his disgrace and her

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own death staring her in the face she can't hold out long."

As Gid turned his back upon his companion Strong almost rose to his feet. He had not had a pleasant night's sleep since that day when he had helped murder the old man, Carlisle, and he appeared ill at ease, and even his dearest friends —and the man had many—thought he was so materially changed that they hardly knew him.

"My God!" he groaned, "am I losing my mind? If I let go my hold now on life, and this idea I have in view, I might as well give up all. If I could get that dead face out of my mind I would be satisfied, but I believe if I live to be the age of Methusaleh I shall be haunted. It is as Gid says—one cannot do despicable deeds without suffering for it, for even in the daytime I feel that ghastly presence, and I'll down that spectre if it takes——"

He rose to his feet with clenched hands, for Gid, leading poor Virgie, entered.

The girl started to pull herself away from her captor, but the miller's hands held her tightly.

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"You bet she knows," Gid cried, "and if you say so——"

"I say no, Gid," hurriedly replied the attorney. "You go and leave me with the girl."

When they were alone Virgie drew farther away from Strong, and the man, seeing the motion, said, sneeringly, in an undertone:

"There's no use for you to struggle. I swear it will not bring you your liberty, nor his out there."

"If he were free you would not dare to treat me so," sobbed Virgie.

"That might be so," was the reply; "but he is not free, neither will he be, if I can have my way about it, unless you agree with me to keep your tongue silent, and very silent, about the things you know."

"I will keep silent as long as I am in your power," answered the girl, "and no longer, and then I will denounce you both as murderers."

"Then I will draw out the tongue that will not remain silent."

"My tongue will be a good sacrifice, if I can

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see you on the scaffold where you belong," said Virgie. "Do with me what you please, but as long as there is a breath in my body I shall never change my mind. You are the murderer of that old man, and every one shall know it if I ever am free."

"You shall never be free. I shall place you back in the silence again, with no one to keep you company but the old man's ghost. How will you like that?"

"Ghosts have no terrors for me," replied the brave girl. "It is you, Mr. Benedict Strong, who ought to worry about ghosts."

The man shuddered, for many times had the same thought come into his mind.

Strong ordered Gid to take the girl back into the room where she had spent the night.

She opened her lips and uttered a cry that would have aroused any human being within hearing distance.

Robert, in the tool-house, knew the voice—that it was his darling, the girl he loved better than

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life. But what could he do for her, shackled as he was?

He hammered with all his might on the door and cried out in his agony for some one to come and help him in his distress.

Gid's mind was aflame. He felt that the girl's presence, and the scenes that had gone before, would lead to his arrest if she were found there, and he went back with a determined air.

"Something must be done, Strong," said he, giving an apprehensive glance at the attorney's face, "for with that girl alive our liberty is threatened, and with her dead we will be safe."

"Then what shall we do?"

"Burn the mill, Strong," gasped the miller. "It has come to the point when we will have to sacrifice, and my old mill must go. The tool-house cannot escape, and that means two enemies gone."

Gid was as good as his word. He half-dragged Strong from the place, and with his own hands lighted the fire which was to consume his own chance of making a livelihood.

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"What have you done? The girl will be roasted alive," gasped Strong, who was really more of a coward than the old miller.

"That's just what I want. Now, come."

He started to leave the place, when Strong broke in:

"Innocent people don't run away from fires. Stay here and do all you can to extinguish it."

Inside the mill two people were wondering what had happened. Poor Dick was weak from the loss of blood. Virgie could smell smoke, but she did not dream what was being done.

Suddenly it dawned upon her that the mill was in flames, and into her mind came the horrible conviction that the men had set fire to it. She gave one piercing shriek and ran to a little latticed window. She could see far out beyond her the swinging arm of the shaft which carried the wheat.

Her voice rose high above the roar of the fire.

She managed to make an aperture in the window, so that her tones were projected outward.

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The agony of it reached Robert Carlisle in his prison-house.

"Robert, Robert!" were the words which appealed to him.

"Let me out, oh, somebody let me out," and Robert could hear some one pounding on the door.

Margaret's voice rang out clear and keen as she insisted against the arguing of somebody—Robert could not just tell who it was—that she would allow Master Robert to get out and help save Miss Virginia.

"He is a prisoner," urged Strong's voice, "and you can't give him liberty."

But Margaret gave no heed to the order of the district attorney and liberated Robert. She then made short work of the handcuffs on the young fellow's arms.

"You are my prisoner," cried Benedict Strong, trying to stay the young man in aiding the girl. "I cannot allow you to evade the law."

By this time the fire was raging below, and the girl was still crying for help.

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In an instant Robert had laid the lawyer at his feet, and was speeding up the shaft-arm.

By this time many people were watching the fire, but not one saw a young man glide from the basement door of the mill and limp away toward the wood. Dick Hardy knew that death stared him in the face if he stayed behind in the building, and he would take his chances in the crowd outside. He made good his escape while Robert kept all eyes centered upon him on the death-giving trap.

"I am coming, Virgie," cried Robert; "try and break the bars. There, now, lean on me and I will save you."

The girl's arms were about his neck. The smoke came pouring from the windows, the long arm of the shaft flung itself into the air, and Robert was clinging to it with a fainting girl as his burden.

The roar that went up from the hundreds of throats and the aid sent to the young people only added to the din, while the shouts of men and women made the clear Sunday air ring.

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There was much conjecture as to how the mill was fired. Robert could not give any evidence, and, as he was a prisoner, he could make no charge against Strong and Gid for keeping the girl in the mill against her will. He remained silent and decided to urge upon Virgie that she should make a complaint against the men the next day. Robert did not try to escape after the fire. Sheriff Hardy, crestfallen over his defeat with the supposed murderer in the mill, had no mercy upon the now more than ever popular young fellow.

Robert this time was taken to the county jail, where he reoccupied the cell that had been his before his escape.

How many times truth is stranger than fiction.

The young man debated long upon what measures he should take to bring the real criminal to justice, being satisfied that Virgie was not to blame for the death of his brother.

With this thought in his mind he went to sleep and dreamed that the jail was on fire and that

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he was trying to save his fellow-beings. In the midst of the fire he saw Dick's face, and he himself, like all dream heroes, saved the sheriff's son from the flames.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE morning following what might have been a dreadful tragedy Robert awoke with a dull feeling in his head, and he realized that he had been wounded from his experience of the day before.

As soon as he had had his breakfast he asked that he might see the sheriff's wife. Mrs. Hardy came to him in a nervous state, and almost in a collapse. The burning of the mill left her uncertain as to the fate of her boy. She prayed earnestly that he might have been saved in some way, but she dared make no inquiries, knowing that her husband would not spare the boy if he found him within the county limits.

Virgie had been taken to the sheriff's home, and Robert knew that the girl was under the same roof with him, and hence his desire to converse with Mrs. Hardy.

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"I want to ask you about Virgie," began the anxious lad. "Is she well after what happened yesterday?"

The woman shook her head gravely.

"She is not," she replied slowly, looking him straight in the eyes; "we have had a doctor this morning for her, and he fears——"

She hesitated here, and the young man gasped:

"Tell me the worst, I pray, for I cannot bear suspense."

"Her brain is a little affected, so the doctor says." Then, seeing Robert's expression of agony, she went on eagerly: "But she can't be sick long; you know, she has such a constitution."

"That's true," replied Robert, his voice filled with intense emotion, "but one brain can't stand everything. What that girl has suffered this last few weeks would have broken down a less brave girl before this. Mrs. Hardy, for the sake of your own boy, God bless him! I beg of you to care for my darling, and if fate has it in store for me to regain my liberty I will repay you a thousandfold."

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"You have long ago repaid me, boy," sobbed the sheriff's wife, "and, Robert, I want to ask you something. You know, I told you about my Dick, and how his father is determined to take him into custody. Well, Rob, he was hidden yesterday in the old mill."

Robert forgot his own grief in that of the woman.

He uttered an exclamation, and cried: "He was not——"

"I don't know," broke in Mrs. Hardy. "I don't know, and my heart is almost broken with the pain of not knowing."

Robert, against his better judgment, soothed Mrs. Hardy, although he felt that if Dick were locked in the old mill there was little hope of ever seeing him again.

All through the following days the town waited breathless for better news of the heroine of the fire. Virgie Grey was battling with death, and had been for weeks.

There was nothing to do but wait, so the doc-

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for said—just to wait until the cloud was lifted from the poor, tortured brain and to aid nature in recuperating the weak body.

Slowly the tired eyes opened one morning and Virgie Grey was herself again.

Through all this time there were two men praying and hoping that the girl would die, for her recovery meant a prison cell for them both if the law should believe what she would swear to. Strong would have gone away, but he dared not now, for, knowing the working of the law so well, he realized that he would be apprehended before he had proceeded far.

The only hope they had—and so both decided in secret conclave in the attorney's office—was that the story that the girl would tell would be taken as one from a disordered brain and Virgie's version of it would not be credited.

One morning, when the sheriff and his wife were eating their breakfast, the man inquired after the patient.

"Strange how that girl has clung to life," said

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the sheriff, "and yet how chipper she's a-coming out of it. I tell you, blood tells every time."

"What that girl was a-doing at the mill is more than I can ever see into," broke in Mrs. Hardy, after a while. "It's a mystery to everybody who speaks of it. And in that upper room, too."

"It might be well to ask her," replied the sheriff, but his wife scoffed at the idea. Had not the doctor said that the girl must have perfect rest and quiet for some days to come, and not be disturbed by painful questioning?

One thing was very strange: Virgie could not remember what had passed for many weeks before the mill disaster, and her mind was a complete blank. She could not even bring to her memory the death of Earnest Carlisle, and she could not help but wonder why she did not see Robert or some one of the family.

"She will tell us all in good time," replied Mrs. Hardy, with a woman's insistency.

They were still talking over Virgie and the strangeness of her illness when a rap at the door

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brought both man and woman from their chairs. It proved to be Gid and Strong.

"We want to know where that child Croonie is," began the district attorney, suavely.

"We was told that the aunt was asked to bring him here," put in Gid.

"Well, so she was," replied the sheriff, "but we got some heart here, if we be the law. I wanted to see the kid."

"It has been discovered," responded Strong, "that the kid fired the mill."

"Oh, has it?" answered Hardy, who always felt like a cat rubbed the wrong way when around the district attorney. "Who made that great discovery?"

Strong flushed to the roots of his hair.

"You have no occasion to talk in that tone to me," he replied, looking the sheriff in the eye. "We are in the same business, Hardy, and there isn't any reason why we should be enemies."

"Nor friends," grunted the sheriff. "And, what's more, I don't believe that Croonie had anything to do with that fire, and I might as well

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tell you now as later. I've been around all these ruins, and what do you think I found?"

Both men leaned over in a breathless attitude.

"I found"—and here the sheriff stopped and waited with a half-smile on his face—"I found the contents of old Mr. Carlisle's iron box, his policies gone, and the box battered to pieces; and what's more, his body has been found in the river."

"When?" ejaculated Strong, as Gid gave a furtive glance toward the door to see if the way was clear for him to make a dead run for liberty.

"Last night, late, and the mill was burned to hide any evidences of that death. We know that no child like Croonie concocted such a scheme."

Strong kept his face quiet, although every nerve in his body seemed ready to assert itself.

"You have Carlisle safe?"

He asked this to change the subject.

"Yes."

"Maybe you think he isn't guilty of the murder of his brother?" and the attorney also put this question very pointedly.

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"Mother and I was just a-talking about it," replied the sheriff, looking at Ellen over his shoulder. "She says like I do—that there ain't no use telling her that Robert killed Earnest, 'cause he didn't, and that the boy is trying to shield somebody else."

"Rot!" gasped Strong. "He's confessed, and that ought to satisfy any jury."

"But it won't when I get through, Mr. Strong," answered the sheriff, with a telling glance. "I'll show your office a clever bit of detective work."

"It might be well for you to spend a little of your time looking for the forger who is advertised for," and Strong sneered as he spoke. "He may be your son, Hardy, but nevertheless he is a criminal."

Mrs. Hardy saw her husband's face whiten. She stepped forward with a glint of anger in her eyes.

"My boy ain't the only criminal who is outside the prison walls," said she, "and there may come a time when you will see that, and it won't be

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through your eyeglasses you'll see it, either, but the bars of a——"

"Hush, Ellen," commanded the sheriff. "There ain't no use using your tongue when 'tain't needed; but I can add one word to my wife's: I'm going to prove Robert innocent——"

"But before you accomplish that," broke in Strong, "I'll send him to the gallows."

"And I'll stand by and see him swing."

Gid muttered this. It eased his mind to think that others had committed murder. Always he regretted the terrible murder of the old man, and in this case it was that misery loved company.

"I want to see Carlisle," impatiently put in the attorney; "so tell the deputy to let me in."

He could bear no more. All along the line he had been baffled. He almost commenced to feel that he was on his way to a prison cell, and he knew that the town would not spare him, for, although he had lots of friends, he could see by the expression on many faces that his movements were not always approved of.

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"I don't see how that man ever came to be district attorney," cried Ellen, when the two had turned their backs. "I wouldn't vote for him if there wasn't another to fill office."

"Nor I," grunted the sheriff. "He thinks I'm going to let Robert Carlisle hang for the murder another man committed."

"But you don't know about that, Luke."

"I don't, don't I? Well, that's just what I do know. Mother, I ain't told you nothing about it, and, in fact, I lied when I said that I fell down t'other day and hit my head. I didn't; Earnest's murderer hit me in the mill."

"What!"

"But I crippled him for life, that I know, for I saw the blood afterward."

"What did he look like?" asked Mrs. Hardy, her face whitening perceptibly.

"I couldn't see his face, as he got away too quick. That old mill is better burned down, 'cause it was overrun with tramps and wicked men."

It did not enter the sheriff's head that he had

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shot his own son, but the little mother trembled as she listened.

"What makes you think that you saw the man, Luke?"

Out came the story about the knife, told almost in a whisper. The sheriff knew that he could trust this woman. She had proven the one confidant of his long life, and never had she failed him.

"Are you going to let Strong swear this fire on poor little Croonie?" asked Mrs. Hardy, after a few moments of thought, in which her heart trembled for her own darling and made her very tender toward all the rest of the world.

"Well, I guess not. He's got to bring better proof than that he just saw the child near the place——

Strong entered at this moment.

"I want to question the boy, Hardy. I know he had something to do with that fire. Where is he?"

"Aunt hasn't brought him yet. Poor little brat!

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Strong, you're not going to try and lay the fire at that child's door?"

Strong dropped his eyes. There was something about this honest sheriff that always made him feel shaky.

"He was near the mill when it burned."

"So were you," replied Hardy, pointedly.

"Don't be a fool, sheriff," gasped Strong. "You would intimate——"

"I would intimate nothing. But let me warn you that I am on the trail of something that's in the air, and before many days I will have unearthed it."

He had hardly gotten the words out of his mouth before Margaret opened the door.

Clinging to her hand was the idiot child.

Margaret glared at Strong as she came in, for in her heart she had always hated the man. He had been the cause of her sister's ruin, and the child's life had been made useless by his abominable temper. The aunt could never forget that this man was father to the child. She did not even incline her head, but grasped Croonie firmly.

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"You might speak to a man," complained the attorney, but Margaret threw up her head and snapped:

"So I would if there was one around. I don't see none but the sheriff."

"Needn't be sassy to the district attorney," put in Gid; "he might hurt you through that kid."

"He can't. No one would let any harm come to this poor child." The tears filled Margaret's eyes as she said this.

"We think that the boy fired the mill," commenced Gid.

"Oh, you do, do you?" snarled Margaret, sulkily. "Well, I don't, but I do know who did it."

Strong looked keenly at her. Did she know anything of the affair? No, for although Gid had done the job, it had not been talked over, so no one had heard plans, and very little had been said about it even between the perpetrators.

"If you know who did it," replied he, "then it is your duty to tell, for that's all we want to know."

"Well, find out, then," snapped Margaret.

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"You wanted me to bring the boy here, Mr. Sheriff?"

"Yes; I want to question him a little on my own account. Go, boy, into the back room and ask the cook to give you a cookie."

"Not until I question him," replied Strong. "Boy, what were you doing at the mill the night of the fire?"

"You know what I was a-doing. I was watching you."

Suddenly a thought came into the sheriff's mind.

"No, Croonie was not watching you, Strong," said he, putting his arm around the child; "he was there to meet the murderer of Earnest Carlisle."

Croonie looked up slyly into the sheriff's face.

"Do you mean Robert?" asked the lawyer, while the rest present were breathless.

"No, not Robert, but another. Rob never committed that deed."

"I will show you differently," sneered Strong;

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"he will swing before any one has a chance to help him."

No one noticed a slight figure standing in the doorway.

It was Virginia Gray. Her eyes were dilated with fear, while the muscles of her mouth twitched with terror.

"Robert, Robert," she murmured. "I remember now; Robert is my love." She screamed out the last words.

Every one in her presence turned toward her.

"So you are going to convict him," she said, in a low voice. "Well, Benedict Strong, I will convict you first."

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CHAPTER IX.

VIRGIE had regained her mind. Everything on that terrible night came back to her, while those in the room were staring at her as if an apparition had appeared before them.

"What do you mean?" gasped the sheriff.

"I mean that I charge that man," and the girl pointed her finger at Gid, "with setting the mill on fire."

Gid made a frantic movement toward the door.

"He tried to take my life," the girl went on, her livid eyes first resting on Gid, then on Strong. "How was it that I came in that locked room? I could not fasten the door on the outside."

"Maybe you were not locked in," insinuated Strong; "there's no telling what you were there for," and the district attorney gave an insulting laugh.

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"But," began the sheriff.

"There's no 'but' about it, Hardy," broke in the lawyer. "The charge is preposterous, and no one sane enough to think out a problem would admit the charge she makes." The attorney had taken his stand by Gid.

"Nevertheless it is the truth, and you were there when it was done. I would swear to it on my death-bed."

"You'd better not," sneered Strong, savagely, "for your word won't be taken. I will tell you all why she was at the mill. She went there to liberate her lover, and to prevent her from so doing I locked her in the mill, and I did not know that the place was in flames until I saw the smoke pouring out of the window."

Croonie was listening with a knowing expression upon his face.

"Gid lies all the time," the child broke in, "and so do you," to Strong. "I know who fired the mill."

"Strong," said the sheriff, "I do not believe the girl when she says that you did this deed, but I

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cannot blame her for wanting to save him, and no more do you."

"I blame any woman who dares to accuse a man——"

"Who is guilty?" said Virgie, with scorn in her voice.

When the two men, Gid and Strong, were walking along toward the village they ventured to speak of the fire.

"If that girl were only dead I should be satisfied," remarked Gid with a grimace.

"I'll find a way to shut her mouth," replied Strong. "I'm going back to see her in half an hour. Give those yaps a chance to get out of the house."

Virgie was so overcome with the thought that her darling was in prison again, and that the rascals who had fired the mill to kill her were at liberty, that she went immediately to bed at the departure of Strong and Gid. And she had not yet arisen when Strong sent up his card, saying that it was imperative that he should see her.

"So you intend to thwart me," he said, as he

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watched the girl coming toward him. "It is a pity that you ever regained your senses, if you do not appreciate the situation in which you place people who desire to be your friends."

He stopped here, for the girl had sunk slowly into a chair. She was still very weak from her illness, and nothing had yet been done because of her indisposition.

"I do not count you among my friends," she replied, languidly, "and whatever you have to say to me, say it, for I am very tired."

"Miss Grey, sometimes in this world we are forced to do things that we do not want to do. I admit that you hold me in your power in a certain measure, but I also have you within mine. Now, then, we can certainly come to some logical understanding."

"I do not want to bandy words with you at all," replied the girl, slowly. "I have told you that I would not spare you, and I will not. I intend to bring you to justice."

"Indeed?" sneered the attorney. "We will see

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about it. I shall make you another proposition. I suppose you want to see your sweetheart free?"

"More than tongue can tell."

"Then I will make it possible for you to have him free, on one condition. You need not think that any one will ever believe a word you say, for you know that even your best friends did not believe what you said when you accused me of burning the mill. Robert Carlisle has accused himself. If he is willing to change his plea I will declare him 'not guilty,' but, as I said, it is on one condition."

"And that?"

Virgie was leaning far over and looking into the man's eyes.

"That you become my wife," he replied, slowly.

The girl shuddered from head to foot.

"I would do anything rather than that," she gasped. "To be the wife of a murderer——"

"Silence!" commanded the lawyer. "Never speak that word again to me while you live."

"But you are——"

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"You have no evidence against me, and your word would not go against mine."

"But you confessed it to Earnest."

"And he is dead. I tell you you are powerless, and if you love Robert, and utter one word of what you have just said to me, he goes to the gallows. On the other hand, you have but to say that you will be my wife, for as another's my liberty would not be safe. I beg of you to tell me that you will——"

"I will never speak that word. I want you to go."

"I cannot. I must have your word that you will be mine. You may love him, but I shall be your husband."

"Never, never!"

"Don't you love him?"

"Better than my own existence."

"Then I offer you a way to let him escape hanging."

"He will never hang. He has friends——"

Virgie was losing ground. She could not hold her own against the calm assurance of this man.

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Only, once in a while he would lose control of himself and a cloud settle over his face; but he was so sure of his argument that the girl lost her courage, and acted as if already the noose was about her loved one's neck.

She was beginning to weaken.

"I have a piece of evidence in my pocket," went on the attorney, "that will take the last hope from under his feet. Will you sacrifice yourself for him?"

"Do you really mean that if I become your wife you will pardon him?"

"Yes."

"Then go now, and I will meet you to-night by the old tree on the river path."

"I shall be there." The man bent lovingly over the woman.

"And if you do not keep your promise to me, then I shall kill you."

Virginia's eyes blazed furiously as she said this.

He did not doubt her words. She watched him

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away as he stepped into the street, and then sank down weeping.

"It is to save you, Robert. No one will ever believe what I say."

Mrs. Hardy thought it about time to come and see about her patient, and found the girl in tears.

"What is the matter, dear child?" cried the woman.

"My heart is broken and my life is not worth living."

The mournful sobs filled the room.

"Why, little girl," soothed the sheriff's wife, "you must not lose hope. He is living, and only just now you should have seen his joy at your recovery. It had been torture for him to think that you did not remember his affliction."

"I remember it only too well," replied the girl. "I shall not forget it."

And then, seeing the woman's eyes full of tears, she exclaimed: "Oh, I should remember that you, too, have trials. I know you are suffering for your dear one."

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Suffering? Had ever a mother's heart been so filled with grief?

"God will bring all out right in the end," replied Mrs. Hardy, reverently. "There, child, go back to your rest."

A lonely man strode through the fields that skirted the village. His face was deadly pale, and, while he was advancing rapidly, he showed great fatigue.

He did not look to the right or left. Evening was approaching and the dusk had covered the river, while down in the marsh the frogs croaked their evening song.

The traveler made his way rapidly toward the sheriff's home. When he reached the gate he looked quickly about and, seeing no one, climbed over the lattice fence as if he were used to it and went around the house to the kitchen.

Mrs. Hardy heard a peculiar clicking sound upon the window.

She went hastily to it, threw up the sash and dragged her boy into the room.

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"Mother, mother, I could not bear it any longer. Is there any one here?"

"No. Oh, Dick, my boy, my boy! I have thought that you were dead. Where have you been since I saw you last?"

"Don't ask me, mother, dear, but let me lie down. And, mother, you are the only one in the world who would pity me. I am so ill."

"You are lame."

"Yes. I fell and hurt myself." Dick said this confusedly. "Mother, put me to bed, and I must not see my father."

"He is not here, child."

"Then I am safe for a little while. What is he doing now?"

"Hunting for a man whom he thinks murdered Earnest Carlisle. He says he saw him the other night when the mill burned."

"Tell me about it, mother," and Dick sank exhausted into a chair.

"He tried to arrest the man, and shot him; then the fellow hit your father with a board and felled him to the earth. After he regained his

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senses the man was gone. But your father says that he must go to a doctor, and he has warned them all. As yet there has been nothing heard from him."

Dick trembled violently.

"My boy, I am going to put you to bed in your own room. No one ever goes there, and you shall rest. I shall dress your wound, and your father shall never be any the wiser."

"Mother, mother, I am so sorry for what I have done. I want to be forgiven, for I may not live long."

"Hush, child; your father loves you devotedly, and so do I. There, now, lie down, like a good fellow, and don't worry about your old daddy. He knows that I hold this room sacred to you."

Mrs. Hardy could not determine whether she should send for her old family doctor and let him into the secret about her boy or not. But Dick was so sick that he must have help; so she went after the physician, and when she had him alone said:

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"Doctor, if I tell you a secret will you promise that you will never, never tell?"

"I promise," replied the physician.

"But I want more than that. I want you to swear it."

"But, Mrs. Hardy——"

"Don't waste time. It is nothing that concerns you, and if you cannot, why, then, I shall not tell you. If you are willing to make me the oath, then I shall be grateful."

There was a quiet dignity about the woman that filled the man with respect. He lifted his hand and gave the desired oath without further questioning.

The sheriff's wife then led him upstairs and into Dick's room. The poor fellow had lost consciousness and was muttering to himself. The surprise of the doctor was more than he liked to admit. He saw that he had been trapped into keeping a secret which involved evading the law, but he could not help himself now, so he went to work with a vim. He found the wound from the sheriff's shot badly swollen. The boy was suf-

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fering from blood poisoning, and so he told the mother.

The doctor had no sooner gone than the sheriff came in. Ellen had been told by the physician that her son was very ill, and she was nervously excited when her husband appeared.

"Mother," said Hardy, "I believe that I am on the trail of the man. It won't be long now before I find him. Why, some boys saw a fellow limping across the fields only a short time ago."

"But it might not be the murderer," faltered the mother, knowing well how nearly her darling had been captured.

The doctor had said to Mrs. Hardy that he feared Dick might be the man her husband was looking for, but the mother's heart would not believe that her son had committed the murder, and although he had forged the check, it had been under great pressure.

She was now willing to battle for him even against his father. She feared that Robert was trying to shield her son, yet she could not give her boy up into the hands of the law. That his

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own father had maimed him struck terror to her heart, and such dreadful times she had never imagined could come to a woman.

The next morning the wife of the sheriff could be seen creeping upstairs to take another look at Dick. He had ceased muttering in his sleep. The mother had spent most of the night at his side, soothing him, although she had feared that her husband might miss her.

Wen she came down again Virgie was talking to the doctor, who was showing his nervousness by rising and sitting, until Virgie asked herself what had happened the good man.

Mrs. Hardy sent the girl away on some pretext and led the doctor upstairs. Again the physician urged the woman to tell her husband about the boy.

"You see, madam," he said, urgently, "your boy is undoubtedly the murderer of Earnest Carlisle, and Robert ought not to die for the crime. I have been thinking much of it during the night, and I beg you again to tell your husband about it."

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"You have promised—aye, even more than that—you took your oath that you would not betray my secret. I hold you to that oath." Mrs. Hardy spoke sulkily and with determination.

"Nevertheless, my dear Mrs. Hardy, let me urge you——"

"There is no use. My boy shall not be connected with this crime. Robert has confessed——"

"But he did not commit the crime, and you know it." This was spoken by Virgie Grey, who had been in the doorway as the doctor's words were spoken.

"You have heard?" asked Mrs. Hardy, going forward quickly.

"I have heard enough to know that Robert is innocent and that the criminal is beneath this roof."

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CHAPTER X.

THE girl looked into the glowing eyes of the woman, and the doctor stood irresolutely by.

"You will not give my boy up, Virgie?" moaned the woman.

"If he is guilty of what Robert is accused of, yes. You must tell me the truth."

"I will tell you all. Doctor, you may go, for I do not need you again to-night."

The man of medicine was glad to make his escape, and he felt somewhat relieved that the girl knew of Dick's presence, for he knew that she would demand fair play.

When he had gone the two women were silent for a few moments. Then the mother spoke.

"Virgie, I took you in when you needed care. You had no one to be good to you. Had I not

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done this you would never have known what you now do."

"That is true."

"And yet you will not relent. I ask you as a mother who loves her boy better than life for you not to give him up to justice."

"Then," replied Virgie, slowly, "if I save your boy you must save mine. I will keep silent about Dick and you must let Robert escape."

"Can I do it?" gasped the sheriff's wife, in sudden agitation. "Oh, tell me how, and I shall be more than willing."

"Then give me the keys."

"I haven't them," replied Ellen; "they are always with the deputy warden at this time. Tell me what to do."

"We will wait until this evening and then make arrangements."

Both women watched the shadows coming on with pale faces. They were in sympathy with each other.

The sheriff was taking his nightly walk

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through the village when Virgie announced that she wanted the key.

"It is Robert for Dick," she announced, quickly. "I will tell Peters that you are ill and need the doctor. All you have to do is to be sick. I will call him, and he will allow me to watch the cells until he returns."

As good as her word, the girl called the deputy.

Mrs. Hardy was writhing on the couch in great pain.

"Get me the doctor, Peters," begged she.

"I can't leave the prison, ma'am," began the man, looking about for another to send on the errand.

"But the doctor must be gotten," insisted Virgie, "and, Peters, you know the sheriff would not be pleased if you should refuse such a little thing as this for his wife."

The man, without a thought, placed his large bunch of keys upon the table, as if he almost divined what was wanted of him.

Almost instantly Virgie had grasped them up and was gone. She had unfastened Robert's cell

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door, whispering for him to wait until she came back. She then returned to the living-room, and Peters was still pouring out the brandy. Virgie placed the keys back on the table.

"I want, oh, I need a doctor," moaned Mrs. Hardy.

"Well, ma'am, I suppose I'll have to go and get one," replied the deputy, and as he was going Virgie followed him and said:

"You left these lying on the table, Peters. I thought you had forgotten them."

Virgie had Robert in the living-room in a twinkling.

"It means, dear," said the girl, softly, "that you are to go away."

"But, Mrs. Hardy, this will get you into trouble."

"Never mind, you must go," replied the sheriff's wife, "and that instantly."

"But what is the use? If I do, I shall be recognized."

"You shall go disguised," said Mrs. Hardy. "A woman's clothes will give you an air entirely

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different from your own. Virgie, go to the closet immediately and get my cloth skirt."

Almost before the words were out of the woman's mouth the girl had her sweetheart arrayed in a long trailing skirt and a jacket, and over the strong, manly countenance was placed a veil, and Robert Carlisle's own mother would never have recognized her son had she not known that it was he.

"There," cried the girl, "go immediately to the river path and take the ferry across, and I will follow you. Sweetheart, you will yet live to be happy with me."

The man dressed in woman's clothes pressed Virgie to his heart. What he was doing now was for her sake. Without her love life would be nothing.

He had hardly let the precious form drop from his arms before the door opened and Dick Hardy steeped into the room. His pale face was drawn with pain and his eyes unnaturally bright. The mother sprang to her feet.

"Dick, child, why are you here?"

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"To help Robert, mother. I heard you planning to help him escape. I will do my share."

He turned toward the prison corridor, and those who saw him go knew that he intended to impersonate Robert Carlisle in his cell.

"Luck, old man!" he cried, looking back, and the sheriff's wife felt that Dick was doing something toward helping the young man who had always been his friend, besides working out his own salvation.

Dick had no more than disappeared when the door opened and the district attorney sauntered in. Some evil spirit must have invited him to make this untimely call. On each face was depicted the agony of the moment.

"You have a caller, I see, Mrs. Hardy," put in the attorney. "And I believe that, if my senses are not wrong, this lady is not a lady, but the prisoner, Robert Carlisle. What are you, a murderer, doing out of your cell?"

The look of sarcasm that spread over the lawyer's face filled Virgie with rage.

"It is not your business, Benedict Strong,"

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cried Robert, throwing back the veil. "I am not here to answer your questions, so kindly forget that you have seen me."

"Oh, you won't answer me, won't you? Well, I think you will."

"Not because you make me," replied Robert. "Now, then, stand away from that door."

"You shall not pass here alive."

"Oh, then, prepare to fight, for not for my liberty, but for my sweetheart, I am going to settle with you."

Strong sprang forward. "Mrs. Hardy, I command you in the name of the law to ring that call-bell."

"And I refuse to interfere," replied the sheriff's wife, sulkily.

"Then, by heaven! if you do not respect the law, I will. Move from that rope." This last order was to Virgie, who was clinging to the bell-rope with terror. Every room in the court-house had a rope leading to the town bell.

"You shall not ring it if I can help it," she replied. "Not while I have life in my body."

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Her glance fell upon the window, where a gleaming face was closely pressed. She gave a desperate cry, and Strong, looking toward the direction of her gaze, saw Gid Snileman's evil face leering in at them. A wave of the attorney's hand brought the fellow bounding into the county court-house.

"Gid," yelled Strong, "ring that bell. Do you hear? A prisoner is trying to escape."

Snileman grasped the girl tightly in his hands and threw her from the bell-rope. Then violently over the town the bell pealed again.

Strong and Robert were then in an altercation, which ended in Robert striking the attorney on the head and making him helpless for a few moments.

Every avenue seemed broken off for the young man to escape. Robert dared not go into the street for fear of meeting the sheriff. Virgie saw that her lover was so hemmed in that he would be taken back into custody. She drew him toward her and persuaded him to enter a wardrobe from which she had taken the clothes he had on.

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"The sheriff is coming," cried she. "It is your only chance. Now, then."

She turned the lock in the door and faced the sheriff. Mrs. Hardy had succeeded in dragging out the district attorney, leaving him in the next room.

"Ellen," cried Hardy, "I heard the bell; tell me what has happened. I feared maybe Johnson had escaped."

Zabi had come in just before the sheriff and had taken in the situation. He knew what the mother of Dick was trying to do for his friend. So he said:

"There's more'n trouble to pay, fer this old devil was a-trying to hurt these two women."

Zabi melodramatically pointed his finger at Gid, who was slinking away from the stern eyes of the sheriff.

"'Tain't no such a thing," replied Gid. "You look in thet room and——"

"Find another just like you," interposed the ever-ready Zabi.

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Puzzled, the sheriff went to the door and tried to open it, but Virgie held the key.

"It is here," she said, simply, turning the handle after the key had been fitted.

"I don't understand all this," said Mr. Hardy, thoughtfully, as if he dreaded to open the door. "Ellen, can you explain?"

Without allowing the woman to answer, Zabi again said:

"There's a man in there——"

At this moment Strong burst open the door.

"Benedict Strong, as I live!" gasped the sheriff.

"Yes, and locked in that room," shouted Strong, "to keep me from doing my duty. Where is that man?"

"What man?"

"Robert Carlisle."

"He is in his cell."

"That he is not," roared Strong. "He has been allowed to escape."

"He's in that wardrobe," sniveled Gid.

"What are you all talking about?" pleaded the

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sheriff. "I go away, and come home to find everything in a turmoil and a set of crazy people crowding the house."

"Robert Carlisle is in that closet."

Virgie touched the sheriff.

"Do not believe them," she said, earnestly. "Robert is in the cell. In this closet is a woman whom Strong was trying to harry. I allowed her to go in there. You may see her if you will."

"Stop," cried the sheriff. "Peters, where have you been?"

This was to the deputy sheriff, who just then came into the room from the street.

"Just to call the doctor. Your wife ain't well, sir."

This was not hard for the husband to believe, for if ever a woman looked ill, it was his wife at this moment.

"Go to the cell of Robert Carlisle and see if he is there. Have your keys been out of your possession?"

"No, sir," replied the deputy, rattling the chain which hung to his belt.

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"Then do as I bid you."

When Dick Hardy heard from his upper chamber that Robert was going to try and escape he knew that there would be a great cry for him. His wound was not yet well. Only a few hours before he had begun to realize anything, but this fact came home to him with a sharper thrill. He could help his dearest friend.

When he entered the cell and snapped the lock he sank down upon the bunk in a stupor. He was a sick man, but bearing it nobly.

Peters sped along the hall. His position depended upon the discovery of the next few moments.

He peeked through the bars excitedly. A man was reclining on the bunk.

He shook the bars, but did not wait for a reply.

He was back at the sheriff's side without a word to the prisoner.

He leaned over the sheriff and whispered in his ear.

"The prisoner is safe in his cell. Open the wardrobe door," broke in Hardy.

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"Madam," the sheriff proceeded, as Robert, in his trailing woman's gown, stood before him, "who are you?"

Robert pointed with his finger toward Strong.

"She means, father," put in Ellen, "that Strong was cruel to her. She went in there to get rid of him."

"It's a lie," growled the attorney.

"It is the truth," gasped Vergie, on the edge of tears.

"That is no woman," replied Gid. "I swear it——"

"And your oath ain't worth anything," replied the sheriff. "This woman can't be Robert Carlisle, for he is in his cell. Madam, do you wish to depart?"

Robert shook the veil which covered his face.

"Then," said the sheriff, with authority, turning to Strong and Gid, "I demand that you let this woman go."

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CHAPTER XI.

THE town was all in commotion, for Robert Carlisle had escaped, and the woman who had been secreted in the closet was a man, so the sheriff decided.

The agitation was so great that even Zabi, who was still watching the machinery, could scarcely keep his poise, and he walked up and down with his hands in his pockets.

His own affairs with Margaret were not progressing very well, because one thing after another had interfered, and the old man was tired of being alone.

Suddenly Trephenie burst upon her father's vision.

"They're a-chasing a woman, dad, and some folks hes seen her. If she comes here, stick her

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in the machine pot, 'cause 'twon't be a her, it's a him, and the she's Mr. Robert, that's what she is."

Zabi grasped the girl by her hands.

"You calm yourself, child," commanded he. "There, now, tell your old dad all about it."

He had hardly given the order from his lips when Virgie rounded the corner of the old mill ruins.

She knew that Zabi was there, and with a cry sprang toward him.

"Oh, Mr. Tucker, I am in such distress."

"And you comed to old Zabi, child. Well, that's the way. Now——"

"I only want you to do one thing. When Strong and the sheriff come here make them believe that Robert is in this neighborhood."

"Oh, you want the lad to have a chance to get away?"

"Yes."

"It's as good as done," replied the grave-digger, looking about to see if Trephenie were listening. But the child had departed.

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"Thank you, dear Mr. Zabi, thank you so very much."

"You needn't thank me, child. I love the boy as well as I could if he were my own brother. If he comes——"

As if some intervening fate had caused it, Robert Carlisle, still in his woman's costume, came upon the scene, and Zabi realized in a moment who it was.

Virgie sprang toward him.

"I could not get away, Virgie," groaned Robert, "and if some one does not help me now I don't know what I shall do."

Virgie flung her arms about his neck.

"God bless my darling," breathed the girl. "You shall not die, dear, for Virgie will save you."

"I tried to avoid Strong's men, but could not," stammered Robert. "Virgie, there is no use of trying to escape fate——"

"Fate has not decreed, my love, that you should die. I have been unfortunate in making Strong and his men believe that I was goin~ to meet you here, but Zabi says——"

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"You bet I said it, old man. You may or you may not hev committed thet murder, but I'm going to help you out, at any rate. Now, then, into the tower with you."

Hardly had Robert disappeared, when Strong and Gid, with the sheriff, came running down the road. They could be seen by Zabi in the fast-gathering light of the morning.

Virgie had crept away, and if Gid had not seen the little form going down the road the girl would have escaped unnoticed.

By Strong's request the sheriff followed the girl hastily, with the idea that she was going to meet her lover down at the ferry. Gid muttered something about giving Robert all he wanted if he appeared before the return of the sheriff. Strong hushed the words before they had hardly fallen from the man's lips.

"Don't be too fresh, Gid," cautioned Strong. "Now, then, you know what to do if Carlisle appears."

"Yes; make him throw up his hands, and then give him—the grave."

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"I'll testify that you did it in self-defense," put in Strong, "and you keep your mouth shut."

"And I'll testify that you are a liar," said Zabi, in a drawling tone so much like Gid's that Strong, who stood with his back to Snileman, thought the old miller was reviling him. The miller, being deaf, did not hear the grave-digger's words.

"How dare you talk like that!" shouted Strong, and his voice was so loud that Gid heard it.

"I didn't sass you," grunted Gid. "But I do want to say to you that I have to get out of this town, and you give me the money to get away with."

Zabi opened his ear. He could not afford to be oblivious to such a conversation. Why should the district attorney give this old miller funds with which to flee the country, and why should Gid want to go?

"I'll give you the money when I see fit," replied Strong, "and not before."

"But I helped you in the job of the old man,"

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went on the miller, "and now you'd better stand by me."

"I said I'd give you the money when I felt like it. Now, Gid, you give me those policies. I'm ready to take charge of them."

Zabi peeked out to look at the man, and could plainly see now by the light of the fast-coming morning that he was flinching from the district attorney.

"I lost them," replied Gid, after a moment's silence. "The devil only knows just where they are."

"Do you mean that you lost those policies?" roared Strong.

"Yes, and I'm glad of it. I lost them, and I ain't going to look for them, nuther. They are a hoodoo to me, that's what they are, and I hain't seen nothin' but the face of that old man since we did that job."

"You're a coward, an awful coward, Gid. Shut up about the old man. What's the use of bringing his name into it all? He's dead—but I'll tell

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you one thing, if you don't do what I want you to I'll prove this whole job against you."

Gid whitened to the lips. It is serious when accomplices turn upon each other.

"You pushed the old man into the mill as well as I did," whined Gid, "and if I swing, you'll do it, too. And I can turn State's evidence, that's what I can."

"You wouldn't do such a dastardly trick?"

Strong's voice was filled with alarm.

"Wouldn't I?" shouted Gid. "Just try and do the sneak act by me, and see."

Zabi heard the argument proceed and was gathering material for future use.

When Strong was alone, waiting for the appearance of Robert, he talked the matter over with himself, and he muttered out loud, his voice filled with fear. The morning blew clear and cold, and the sun was fast trying to rise out of the far horizon.

Strong seemed almost unable to get his nerves into check as he stood waiting for developments.

He knew that Gid was frightened with his

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threats, and felt now that he would be safe if Virgie and Robert were only out of the way.

Gid came running in from the road.

"I've been a-waiting, sir, and it seems to me that there's a man up in that little tower-house where the machinery is a-goin' up."

"Well, what if there is? That has nothing to do with the man we want." Strong turned away disgustedly.

"I thought I'd better tell you, sir. It may be old Zabi."

"That's who it is," replied Strong. "Now, go and look again."

Zabi, from his hiding-place, smiled, for he knew that the man in the tower was Robert, and the old grave-digger earnestly hoped that the young fellow would not be foolish and make his presence known.

Zabi knew that Margaret would soon bring his breakfast to him. The woman, although faithful to her suffering mistress, loved this old grave-digger with all her heart. She was going to

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marry him in the end, as soon as Mr. Robert was acquitted.

Zabi slipped out from among the ruins of the mill and went back to his post, and as Margaret came in she missed the old man, but came upon Strong.

"What are you here for?" cried the attorney, looking suspiciously at the basket carried on her arm. "What have you got there?"

"You just find out, if you can," replied the woman, with a sneer.

"Don't speak to me that way," commanded the attorney.

"Then I'll ask you what are you here for? I come bringing my good man his meal, but you—you hain't got no call to be here at this time of night."

"I come here in the name of the law. Robert Carlisle has escaped, and you can't tell me you've got food for that old man in that basket. I believe that you are bringing it here for Robert Carlisle."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, then, listen: I did

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bring it for him, and he is a-eatin' it down the road. By this time he is so far away that you won't set your eyes upon him again."

Strong jumped to his feet with an oath. If what the woman said was true, then he would not get the credit of catching him.

He bounded away without waiting to question the woman again.

Margaret laughed heartily when she saw how her Irish wit had helped her to get rid of the attorney. She had taken it upon herself to furnish Zabi with his meals while he had extra work, for was she not to have a new ring and the money which Zabi got from the deal?

She went back to the tower-house, still with the smile on her lips. Zabi's eyes glistened when he caught sight of the basket and listened to the tale of his sweetheart. He reveled in anything that bothered the district attorney.

He told the woman to go back immediately—that he had heard something to attend to. It was that he had listened to Gid tell the lawyer that some of the contents of old Carlisle's box was on

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a little island, and that it would stay there for all of him.

He then started for the ferry, and before the expiration of an hour he had the tell-tale evidences which he intended to use against the men who had murdered the helpless old man.

He fitted into the lock of the box the little key his daughter took from Strong and the evidence was complete.

The sheriff was at his wits' end. He had not dared to accuse his wife of openly allowing the prisoner to go free.

He sometimes thought that the girl Virgie was in conspiracy with his wife, yet he disliked to doubt either of them.

And, on the other hand, Mrs. Hardy suffered because she had to deceive her husband. The moment that Robert disappeared from the room in his female attire she slipped to the cell where he had been and forced her own boy to go back into his room again, leaving the cell empty. She knew that it would not be long before the discov-

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ery was made that Carlisle had gone, and then Dick, if found, would be held for his crime.

After darkness had fully settled she insisted that Dick go to the ruins of the mill and hide in some of the recesses, and she would bring him the food he needed as of yore.

And through the darkness she took the lame fellow and installed him safely where no human eye could discover him.

The night that Zabi found the real murderer of old man Carlisle seemed to be one of disclosures. Robert had evaded the law and had been hiding for some time. Dick had not been found, and the sheriff's wife breathed afresh and with more ease than she had for months, for she knew that Virgie would never allow Robert to die for a crime that seemed now to be fastened upon her own son.

Croonie still tried to find the boy to give him the knife, but he never allowed the sheriff to get near enough to him again to get the weapon away from him.

This night, when the whole village seemed to

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be aroused, the child was seen to flit through the roads toward the old mill. He had kept an eye upon the place for many days, but every time, with a hopeless expression upon his face, he would slink home discouraged.

The sheriff noticed the preoccupied air of the child, and with the caution of his office followed him. He knew now that Virgie had not gone to meet her lover. The child might give him the clue he wanted.

With this thought in his mind he tracked Croonie to the old mill for the second time, and came face to face with his wife Ellen carrying a heavy basket upon her arm.

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CHAPTER XII.

"WHAT are you doing here?" asked Hardy, suspiciously, his eyes wandering first to the basket, then to the woman's eyes. "You are bringing food to somebody. Robert Carlisle is in this building, or else I am mistaken. Is it possible that *you* care for this man?"

The woman braced herself as if she had received a shock.

"Father," she cried, "how can you say such a thing to me, your own wife!"

"Then answer my question: who is the man here that you are feeding?"

"Won't you trust me, pa?" pleaded the woman. "Believe me, your name is the most precious thing you have ever entrusted me with."

"Then see that you don't abuse it. Woman, I

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swear that I will never take you to my home again if you do not tell me your errand."

Bitter tears rained down the woman's cheeks as she stood between two fires. Her boy would be taken to jail by his own father, or she would be turned from her fireside, where with all honor she had always reigned.

She looked into her husband's eyes. His expression was so stern and impatient that she felt the end of all her happiness had come. Then something happened that made the woman shiver in her heart. Her husband turned toward the very spot where her darling was hidden.

"Father, can't you trust me?"

"No," harshly replied Hardy. "I don't believe there ever was a woman who was worthy of the faith I have placed in you."

The door suddenly opened before the sheriff had time to turn the handle, and Dick Hardy stood pale and tall before his father.

"Dad," he began, with tears in his eyes, "I meet you again under painful circumstances, and

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the first thing I ask you is to apologize to my mother for the insult you gave her."

The sheriff looked first from his son to the mother, and, seeing the state of affairs, walked to Ellen and took her in his arms.

"Poor little mother," he said, in a deep undertone, "I feel that I cannot say enough to show you that I have wronged you. What mother would not come as you have for the sake of her child?"

"Father," cried Dick, "I surrender to you, not for forgery, but for——"

"What, boy?" and the sheriff looked into his son's eyes.

"I swear that I am the man you shot in the leg."

The sheriff reeled back.

"You are not the murderer of Earnest Carlisle?"

"Father, I know in my own heart that I did not murder that man, yet I was there when the deed was committed. But Robert was not as guilty as I, so I must stand in his place."

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Just then they heard a sound like that of an owl.

"It's the child, Croonie," said Dick.

"Yes, I followed him here," said the sheriff. "I should not have found you at all, boy, but for the idiot boy."

"He has come to find me," replied Dick. "Let me question him, please."

The father and mother withdrew into the shadow. Dick answered the child's call, and Croonie bounded into the enclosure.

"I came to see you in spite of the bats in my head. I hate bats, I does. Do you want the knife?"

"Yes," replied Dick, now glad that he did not have to be careful of the tone of his voice; "give it to me, boy."

The child held up the large knife, with the end of the blade gone.

"That's not the one, Croonie. I want the knife that killed the young man, Earnest."

"That's the one," replied Croonie, stubbornly,

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"the very one. Why, I pulled it out of his body myself."

Dick shuddered.

Then suddenly he called to his father, who came bounding toward him.

"Croonie, tell my father about the knife."

The sheriff was handling the knife, and saw that it was the same one he had fitted the point to.

"This ain't your knife, Dick," he said, slowly, looking into his son's eyes. "I never saw you with that."

Dick, without answering, turned to Croonie.

"Was there any one else in the room, child, but you and me and the dead man?"

"Yes, there was a shadow—a big, black shadow that came out of the darkness and put this knife into Mr. Earnest. He dropped and then the shadow went away."

Dick turned toward his father as he reeled in weakness.

"Father," he cried, "I am not guilty of this murder. The shadow is the man who did it.

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would ask you as my father and as sheriff of this county to find the real criminal."

"So I shall, boy——"

"And so shall I," and Virgie came in hearing of their voices and offered her aid to the father and mother.

"I would advise you, Mr. Sheriff, to take your son home and give him good care, and not to say anything about his being with you until he is well enough to do something for himself."

The girl's advice was taken. Hardy helped the dear son from the mill to the court-house with a feeling of thanksgiving in his heart, and on the way Dick told him about how Earnest Carlisle had ruined the life of his darling with false promises, and how Mary Farrell had died and was buried with the money he had drawn on the forged check.

The sheriff was silent a moment, and then said, with emotion:

"Boy, I wonder you could keep your hands from the fellow as long as you did. But remem-

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ber, everything will come out well, and you shall not suffer for another's sin."

Virgie had taken the knife from Croonie, and when she heard the statement that a black shadow had come out of the darkness and had killed the man Earnest, she vowed that not only her Robert, but Dick should be free from the charge of murder.

Hardy, after seeing the boy comfortable, came back to find Virgie.

He still had it in his mind that the girl knew where Robert was.

While the sheriff had been gone Virgie had questioned the child, Croonie.

"Ghosts live here in this old mill," said the child, after they were alone. "Big ones, too, with faces like devils. But I ain't afeerd of nothin' when I'm with you. Your eyes would scare away anything that wanted to hurt little boys, wouldn't they? And when I look at you I can think perfectly straight."

"That's what I want you to do, child, to think,

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and I want you to remember who the man is that owns this knife."

" 'Twasn't a man," muttered the child; "it was a shadow—a real shadow, and it crept like this," and here Croonie bent down and screwed his pretty little face into a series of grimaces.

Then stopping suddenly, he said:

"There, that is the shadow now I saw that night," and he pointed to a long shadow of a man which now lay in the sun before them.

Virgie peeked about and saw Strong and Gid coming toward them.

"Are you sure you saw that shadow, Croonie?" she asked, earnestly.

"Course I am," replied Croonie.

"Oh, Croonie, that is Mr. Strong. But I want you to take this knife and when they come in you drop it on the ground. Don't say anything, will you, dear?"

"You don't want them to know that you are here?"

"No."

"All right; then skip." The child's brain

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seemed to be in good condition when he was with Virgie.

The girl slipped away just as the two men discovered Croonie.

"Very funny that, with the whole town out, we can't locate that man," Strong was saying, and he stopped short at the sight of the boy.

"What are you doing here, kid?" asked the attorney, suspiciously.

"None of your business," replied the child.

"Then I'll make it my business," said Strong, swiftly coming toward Croonie.

"Don't get sassy," cried Croonie, and the knife slipped from his fingers onto the floor.

"What's that?" asked Gid, sharply, as the click fell upon his ears.

"It's a knife," replied Croonie, "and I want it. You give that to me, Mr. Strong."

"Where did you get it?" asked the lawyer, his face whitening.

"Never mind; it's mine, and I want it."

"Well, you won't get it," replied Strong. "The knife is not yours, but mine."

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Virgie stepped from her hiding-place at this moment, and said, jubilantly:

"That's right, Benedict Strong. The knife is yours, and the owner of the knife is wanted for the murder of Earnest Carlisle."

Strong staggered backward. He had not expected anything like this.

"How came you here?" he muttered.

"I had the child purposely drop that knife that you might claim it. You fell into the trap, and this time you shall pay the penalty of your crime."

"Ah, you are a clever woman, Miss Grey," sneered Strong, "but you are not quite so clever as you think you are. I will kill you before you are able to give in any evidence."

"I am not afraid of you," she replied, stoutly. "Run, Croonie, and scream out the whole story."

The boy bolted toward the opening the fire had made in the mill.

"Follow him, Gid," cried Strong, but the miller shook his head.

"The child can't do any harm. It's that girl.

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Now, then, miss, you will swear that you won't say anything about this affair, or I will——"

"I am not afraid," retorted Virgie. "I can fight and scream if you touch me, and I will. So beware."

As both men rushed at her she struck Gid with a piece of iron pipe she had behind her back.

He fell to the floor, and before the girl could defend herself again she was crushed in the arms of the district attorney. In the mill were bins blackened by the fire. Up above these were bushels of wheat that had never been touched since the flames ruined the workings of the mill. Suddenly the thought came into Strong's mind. He held the girl over a bin and growled: "Swear that you won't tell a word of what you know, or down you go."

"I will not swear it," she replied, bravely.

"Then over you go," and, opening his arms, he dropped the girl down into the darkness.

Gid was reviving on the floor from the blow Virgie had given him.

"Where is she?" he asked.

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"Down that hole," replied Strong.

"Then open the shaft and let the wheat from above come down on top of her and she will never bother us any more."

"Do it yourself, then," replied the attorney. "I threw her in; now you do your part."

"But I killed the old——"

"Hush! Have you no sense? I command you to draw the lever and let the wheat down."

"Then watch while I—pull it."

A few grains of wheat tumbled down as the great arm moved slowly around. Then it stopped.

"The stuff won't run," gasped Gid.

"Make it," replied Strong. "There are tons of grain up there."

"I say it won't come down."

"Then, fool, get out of the way and let me pull it."

As his hand lay on the lever and he was about to pull it, Robert Carlisle slipped down the lever from the tower with a pistol in each hand.

"You have used the wrong lever, Mr. Strong,"

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cried Robert. "Your hand on that one will only take your own life. I will not hesitate to fire."

"And I will not hesitate to take your life to save my own reputation and my life."

A struggle began, but Strong and Gid had not counted upon the coming of the sheriff. Hardy had listened to the threats made by the lawyer and then appeared, saying:

"You might as well give up now, Strong. I have heard all. You and this man here are guilty of murder."

In a rage, Strong raised his revolver and fired at Robert. But the shot went wide of its mark, and Gid, wicked as he was, received the bullet in his breast.

There was nothing more to do but to rescue Virgie from the wheat bin, and Robert, relieved of the charge of murder, went back to his dear old aunt with a happy heart, for had he not his sweetheart, Virgie, and Strong was occupying his former cell.

There are only two more circumstances worth knowing. Zabi turned in the policies he had

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found and received a reward. Margaret listened to his pleading and the two were married immediately.

One evening, when the sheriff and his wife were sitting at the table, a knock announced a visitor.

A tall, well-formed man came in and shook hands with Mr. Hardy.

"Hardy," he said, "I'm sorry that I ever took up this thing against Dick. I have withdrawn the charge of forgery and I want to give him a place in my bank. I have heard what made him forge my name, and 'tis a very queer man who would not pardon another when that other sinned for the woman he loved."

While Robert and his wife were away on their wedding tour a clipping was sent to them from a home paper. In connection with the one which told of the suicide of Strong in the prison cell was one which told of little Croonie being operated upon by a surgeon and that he had recovered his right mind.

"Poor little man," sobbed Virgie, in her happi-

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ness, "I always said that Croonie helped me in freeing you. And if he can be like other people what a bright man he will make."

"True, dear," replied Robert, taking his little wife in his arms. "But, while Croonie was daft, he said many a word that was true. For instance, his favorite expression, which you and I can verify, was, that all the dastardly crimes are committed WHEN THE WORLD SLEEPS."

THE END.

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